

FREE, WHITE & 16!



ROBERT B. COOPER

Free, White & 16!

Can a 15 year old girl, abandoned by wayward parents to a housekeeper at age 10, survive alone with an annual trust fund allowance of \$100,000? And then she discovers hundreds of millions of 1953 dollars, also abandoned!

Robert B. Cooper

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To Andrew, Anita and Seth

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This book is a work of fiction and except in the use of historical facts - of which there are many - any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental as is the uncanny similarity between the author's name and one of the two primary characters in this story.

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The cover: created totally by PM, a superb and skilled friend of the author who was in fact the first person (other than the author) to read the *full* 'FW16' story from start to finish. His forbearance in responding and reacting to the author's suggestions are 'beyond the pale' of normal friendship and his covers reflect the story rather precisely.

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YES! There is a sequel; "Free, White & 25!" available 2013.

Chapter One

Almost an Adult

Age 15 male, or female, always perhaps an unstable transition year, although seldom more demanding than in California following World War Two. Straddling between your parents treating you as a *kid* and the promise of progressing to adulthood *shortly* remains fraught with emerging, unfamiliar emotions even today, as was also true in the early 1950s. You are an almost: *Almost* old enough to drive a car, *almost* old enough to leave school, *almost* old enough to get a job, and *almost* old enough to be married. Very nearly old enough, but not quite; tell that to your hormones! This is about that phase of life, a reflection from someone now much the elder with grandchildren caught today in this generational-neutral mid-teens time warp.

What makes this story enchanting and timeless are the totally unique, seldom-if-ever to be repeated, coincidences that rapidly-advance two 15 year olds into adulthood at a juncture when American society was evolving at double-speed. And, not the least important influences of that historic era; the *birth* of Rock and Roll painted against a backdrop of a new American *nationhood* energized by the inauguration of coast-to-coast television. Instantly - east, west and the middle had become of one culture; a single binding thread overlaying the entire continent and in the process, transforming hundreds of regional pockets each previously with their own local traditions. When, shortly, Elvis Presley would gyrate his hips on the Milton Berle TV show, America - the nation - would be presented with a real-time hiccup resonating from Boston to San Diego as one nationwide harmonic chord. And so we begin.

French 101: sophomore year of high school, at Acalanes High; Northern California; September 1953. The month's chart topping music was *Vaya*

con Dios created by the pioneer multiple-track genius Les Paul with the assistance of Mary Ford. Bill Haley with The Comets had pushed close to the top-of-the charts in July (*Crazy Man, Crazy*) but *Rock Around the Clock* remained for the future; as did the rock and roll overhaul of American culture. Chevrolet was introducing a new concept car, *The Corvette*, and 300 identical six-cylinder all-white with black fold-down tops would be produced. Not all would be sold; the two-speed automatic transmission and sluggish performance did not bode well for the concept. Closer to home, three weeks after crossing the United States to arrive in California as an immigrant at 15 years just shy of 5 months of life and tossed into a high school melting pot so foreign to my conservative upstate New York birthing, I might as well have stepped off the Greyhound bus onto the moon.

The choice of French as my first and mandatory state-required second language during high school was a craps shoot; Spanish and German were also on offer but as a devotee of classic literature neither seemed appropriate. A strong family historical sense insisted I not consider the Spanish or Germans as neither had been helpful to the War of Independence; in fact King George III employed Hessian soldiers to fill out his Army of Loyals compounded by my country having only eight years prior completed a prolonged series of battles with the Germans. French was an 'oh-well' choice-by-elimination.

By day three I knew French was a mistake, but neither of the two non-opted choices would have been an improvement. I was not destined to be a language person.

Something poked my right shoulder and ever so slowly I cautiously turned in my seat determined not to attract the attention of the hawk-nose-thin English-as-a-second-language Paris-born teacher.

A small piece of paper, torn from a pocket-sized notebook, appeared in front of my face, which instinctively I grasped, returning to a forward posture. In large block letters reminiscent of first grade printing, it read:

*"Hi immigrant. My name is Carole and I live in Orinda.
Perhaps you need some help with French? RSVP
(Repondez s'il vous plait)."*

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Tempted to turn back around and smile acknowledgement, the note meandered down into my French tutorial and out of significant fear of being reprimanded by the teacher, who seemed to be studying me from the corner of her narrow eye, I simply hunched my shoulders in acknowledgement to the girl one seat behind.

Nobody wrote me notes; especially girls. She was a fellow tenth-grader, smiled when I chanced looking her way on entering the classroom, and in our against-the-wall row of individual desks I was three-back from the front and she four. Now I knew her name; Carole. The *last* fantasy I would have created - within eight months she would be my wife, both of us barely age 16!

Trying to reconstruct her features in my mind, totally losing the ten-percent concentration directed at the French teacher, arriving at the conclusion on a scale of 1 to 10 she would be a 5 or 6 for her looks and figure; very ordinary, but certainly not an ugly duckling. But when the teacher asked for classroom participation, Carole was often a first respondent. I had yet to raise my hand to answer a question, posed in a language I did not comprehend and certainly could not answer in the tongue being taught. OK; so she was either pre-educated in French or bright. I decided bright was my elective choice, optimism being an ingrained mental habit.

Arriving at Acalanes High School had been a life-changing event in my mid-teen years and when Carole introduced herself to me on the third day of French class, my tenure in California was measured by weeks. "Immigrant" was an interesting word, for in fact during August I had travelled by Greyhound bus from upstate New York to Oakland, California to join parents and a younger brother who had preceded me by two months. A miniscule number of people knew this fact; Acalanes was so totally different from my ninth grade Ithaca High School that even adjusting to the California culture was a daily struggle. Boys chose peg-leg pants, suede shoes of various pastel colors, and girls hung out of their sizes-too-small blouses above skin tight skirts leaving one wondering how they wiggled out of them to use the restroom. And the language! Ithaca, being the home of Cornell University, was a cultural intelligence-haven compared to *Hey*

Man, cooties, hip, square, way-out and Screw you! reverberating throughout the Acalanes hallways. My response to this culture shock had been to retreat, as a tortoise into its shell, inward. I had allowed two fellow students into my three-day life at Acalanes at this point; one a male who worshipped Eddie Fisher and lamented his own father's absence overseas in the US Navy; the other a chance acquaintance who shared my only 15-year-old passion in life: ham or amateur radio. Only they, I believed, knew my newness to Acalanes as a recent arrival from a distant eastern state. So why had Carole chosen to address me as "immigrant"?

Lunch time at the Acalanes cafeteria immediately followed French 101. The Eddie Fisher devotee, wearing pink suede shoes, located me quickly as I pondered luncheon choices that included foods such as Tacos, which to a kid from Ithaca had never previously appeared in my diet. He started to share the latest *Oh My Papa* trivia when my shoulder reacted again to a poke. Carole. I turned and smiled as she glared at the suede-shoe dressed Fisher fan, which registered as *bug off* - NOW! And he did.

"You need help in French," she began. "I can do that. You require three years of a second language to apply for university here. This is not New York, amigo."

Stunned and suddenly not hungry for any of the on-offer luncheon choices, I glanced at the wall clock; 32 minutes until 4th period. My reaction to her pointed statement, obviously based on her knowing far more about me than I could begin to comprehend, was to nod towards an unoccupied outdoor table for two. Pulling a sandwich, and then two, from her shoulder strapped purse, she smiled back. "Here - it is liverwurst and I made it fresh this morning. If you don't like liverwurst now, in a month you will be totally dependent upon it for your daily iron intake. Trust me."

"*Trust me?*" I would reflect upon that introductory statement tens of times over the coming months. "Trust me!" I decided at that instant she might even be a 7 or 8.

"My name is Carole Caldecott and while you live at 1016 Sunnybrook Drive in Lafayette, I live in the hills above Orinda. You are of English parents and have a grandmother who has a double-tie back to the original

Almost an Adult

Mayflower. Your hobby is ham radio and your best subjects are history, science and English. Math is not your favorite and without my help you will fail French. And - what do you wish to know about me?"

The first bite of her handmade liverwurst sandwich had barely escaped down my throat and in fact while it *was* a new sensation it was also - as she promised - trusty in taste. But in a world decades before computers and a generation before *geek* even became a word, her knowledge of who I was and what interested me was a choking hold. I gagged and she was already standing, instantly presenting a glass of something cold, and thumping my back.

"Look Bobby - as your mother calls you - I am not here to upset you. I have a plan which involves us both and I need you healthy and at the top of your game; get over choking and let me explain."

And so I was introduced to a girl who would turn out to be mature far-far beyond her fifteen years and to my shock and occasional dismay significantly smarter than I. But, as it would evolve over the coming months, she lacked a few street smart basics which I possessed. Perhaps, as it turned out when we were married, that was what directed her to me from seat four directly behind in a French class neither of us might complete.

Chapter Two

"My mother is Hilda; my father is John"

Over the remaining 30 or so lunch minutes Carole explained her knowledge of me, but only after I pressed her more out of concern for my sanity than any real fear.

"I have an acquaintance who works after school in the Records Office; she pulled your transcript for me two days ago and made a handwritten copy. It is here," pointing to her neck-slung purse. "You, over the next few days, will be a test - if I have selected the wrong fellow, I'll know within a week. For now, you are *my candidate*. Now - we need time together and you should arrange to come and visit me in my home in Orinda. Today you can ride the bus home with me, or if you need to first check with your family, tomorrow will be okay as well and perhaps better because it is Friday and you can stay over."

"*Stay over?*" I said it aloud.

"Simply tell your mother you have met a ham who lives in Orinda with a superb amateur radio station and you are going home to visit - *him* - for Friday night and probably Saturday night - and here's my personal phone number which you can give to your parents. Oh yes, while I don't operate a superb ham radio station there is one on my property my grandfather built, so it will not be a total fabrication. My objective is to get us alone long enough for me to test you."

I never finished that first liverwurst sandwich, but over the coming weeks there would be dozens more with high iron content. Even here she had a hidden agenda - as it would turn out.

Carole Caldecott, descending as a fourth generation Californian, a great-grandfather who somehow obtained land title to more than ten thousand

acres of then low-value, barren, hillside land east of San Francisco where, over successive generations, Oakland and Berkeley would grow. And Orinda, a near-day-long horse trek from Oakland when her great-grandfather settled here, had by 1953 grown into an address for the ultra-rich. But none as ultra as Carole's family; it was *their* ancestor who first obtained property title to what grew into a community. I knew none of this as the initial unfinished liverwurst sandwich grew foul on the gold-colored paper napkin Carole provided from her purse. I would learn only a fraction of this over the coming three days and two nights with a girl who, as it turned out, shared not only my school class age but my actual birth date; April 20, 1938. But of course she already knew the coincidence of birth dates as I struggled through a conversation that left me totally mindless for the balance of Thursday and all of Friday - until joining her on the Orinda bus for a journey to a home I could not even imagine in advance.

My family's new home in Contra Costa County's Lafayette was, by Ithaca standards, rather nifty; even cool. I had a separate building, for my amateur radio adventures, shared with my father as his woodworking shop, but seldom yet used because of the stress of a new employment position. Our immediate adjoining neighbor turned out to be Henry J. Kaiser and his multi-thousand square foot ten-building complex made our more California-standard suburban home of the 50s look like it was; a house. But Henry J, in his third marriage, had a son of almost identical age to my five-year-younger brother Kenny; a two-minute walk merged them as friends. As it would turn out over the next few weeks, Carole seemed to know all of this before I felt comfortable confiding in her. She had an apparently endless supply of information about me, my family, and my future. It was the future segment where she would inject herself.

I had briefly visited, with my brother, the Kaiser estate shortly after arriving in Lafayette. One required a printed map of the buildings and rooms within to even appreciate where you were at any given moment. The staff numbered in the dozens, befitting a man whose boatyards launched a brand new 300-foot long cargo ship every 4 days during World War Two. There was rich and then there was our neighbor Henry J.

"My mother is Hilda; my father is John"

Stepping off the Orinda school bus with a girl who rapidly was approaching a 9 in my mind, in front of a low slung adobe fence that seemed to have middle but no end - in either direction - was not overly impressive as I'd seen big before. In fact from the near-hill-top gate the house itself did not appear to be that size-able. Looks were deceiving and big would turn out to be the wrong measuring stick. Henry J's place was California modern; all built from 1943 utilizing the products of Kaiser Steel, Kaiser Aluminum, and a dozen additional Kaiser firms. He was the man who, post-WWII, was leading the GI home evolution by building 5,000 homes in Hawaii, *all* at the same time! My Lafayette neighbor Kaiser was rich beyond compare but Carole's fourth generation was *wealthy* and never the two would compare. My new *girl friend* was the latter and as it turned out her family did not even recognize the Kaisers. "You never mention your mom or dad," I had asked during our 25-minute bus ride to her reddish, steel gated fence. "You described a grandfather, but no one else. Yes?"

Carole's bus stop was the end of the line; the bus having deposited a small number of other Orinda-based students at various lower-level locations and then after climbing to nearer the top of the ridge, Carole's front security wall. She had ignored my question, asked perhaps ten minutes before we alighted in front of the gate and accessed with a small purse-carried electronic box.

As the gate closed behind us she chose now to answer my query; it perhaps being a three-minute walk mostly uphill to a brown-brick vine-covered complex essentially invisible from the street or gate. "Hilda and John," she began, offering to carry my knapsack into which my mother had insisted I pack enough clothing until Sunday. My parents were impressed I had met a fellow ham living in Orinda and had wished me a happy weekend knowing only Carole's telephone number to substantiate I was not someplace else far away. But they had no reason not to trust me and over the coming months this would be pivotal in what would develop between Carole and me. They had trusted me to solo-ride a series of Greyhound buses from upstate New York to California in mid-August and a weekend away with a new ham radio friend seemed like a proper next step to both of them. I was, as my mother often reminded me, '*almost sixteen*'.

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"Hilda and John are my parents. I do not refer to them in person or out of person as mom or dad - *ever*."

My mental reaction was a new-to-California supposition; half the kids I had met at Acalanes seemed to have a step-parent on one side; sometimes both. So if Carole did not call Hilda "mom" or John "dad", perhaps neither or one of the two were in fact second or third or who knew what marriage parents?

"Hilda bore me and as far as I can determine John was the source of sperm. However, Hilda transferred raising me to a housekeeper from the day after my grandfather died and John has been mostly disengaged as a parent for even longer. Actually, he is John junior after my grandfather John Senior. But after granddad died, I sort of dropped the junior part. They are not here today," tacked on without explanation.

She used a large brass key to unlock the eight-foot high double-wide native timber front doors while I pondered what I was doing *here* anyhow - no mom and I understood no dad and the whole weekend was built around a story *she* created for my parents - my mom in fact - about meeting a ham radio operator from Orinda?

This would be an appropriate spot to point out my previous 15 years 4 months and 20 days of life. In Ithaca I had a few Cornell University style girlfriends; nothing approaching conjugal relations had ever transpired there and while one girl had invited me into her bedroom months before I left for California, intimacy had not followed. Now here I was with Carole, until this point escalating from a 5 or 6 to approaching 10 and we were standing in the amber-tiled foyer of an entrance room that made Henry J. Kaiser's house look *cheap*. I had never previously been inside a *real* California house - that was obvious. This was one, built with a care and attention to detail which perhaps had evaporated 50 years prior. And - this struck me the hardest - Carole and I were apparently more or less alone here. Not just that moment but for one, two nights? And she had repeatedly told me "I have a plan for us" and setting side the subterfuge of the ham radio story, nothing was evident to me. *A plan?*

Chapter Three

"My grandfather's ham radio station"

"This is our room," Carole explained after we climbed two sets of spiral stairs, crossed landings filled with fresh garden flowers in huge vases, and entered a room eight times the size of my Lafayette bedroom, featuring what could only be described as a California modern, very large, bed. King size may have existed in 1953, but it was not yet a marketing tool. Carole's room had a bed large enough for multiple basketball players to sleep without interfering with one another. I made that comment.

"Oh yes, you played serious amateur basketball in New York - correct?"

Once again her detailed information about my pre-California past stopped me speechless. "You know that because..." I began.

"In Lafayette in your top dresser drawer there is a chain with a gold miniature basketball attached; it has the dates when you played in a tournament in Elmira - as I recall - New York. You played what position and would that be where you broke your right ankle?"

I sat down on the over-sized bed, perspiring. Was she saying she had been in my bedroom in Lafayette? That she had somehow deciphered the inscription on the trophy I had helped win? Was this girl magic or perhaps some type of witch? What *was* I doing here? As I would learn, she could and did read many of my thoughts. I did not immediately answer her.

"I am not going to attack you. Yes, this is a large bed and we can share it without you being molested by me. But then if you are ready to enter the grown up world, well, so am I and this *might* be a start to that. This will - *Trust Me* - be a very educational weekend!"

"The gold miniature engraved basketball?" I began in a voice quivering several decibels below my normal speaking level.

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Carole broke into a wide grin and then laughed for several seconds, sitting down on the bed next to me. Her right hand slowly fell to my knee as her left hand gently touched my chin turning my face to hers. "Look at me Bobby," she began. "I am not to be feared, at least not by you. Just the opposite; if you pass my test I - we - will be the best thing that will ever happen to either of us. No, I have not been inside your home, but your mother has a house cleaning woman each Thursday and it cost me \$5 to have her go through your chest of drawers and make a list of anything unusual. So my earlier question - your medical information from the school transcript mentioned a broken right ankle; from playing basketball?"

Her hand released from my chin, but our eyes remained locked. I relaxed with an audible sigh.

"Well ... you are very - ahh - amazing and scary. And a bit frightening. Right now I am wondering what you would or could not do if you set your mind to some goal?"

"Your ankle?"

"Oh yes - I was playing basketball in a state under-15 finals match as right forward and the other side averaged 4 inches and 50 pounds over our starting five. This made us play harder and one too many attempts to capture a rebound against a guy who should have been playing semi-pro ball ended when I struggled to out-skill him while he was standing on my right foot. Instant break and that ended my short period as a basketball fanatic."

"May I inspect your right ankle?"

"Help yourself," I responded lifting it from the floor as Carole dropped to her knees in front of me, removing my brown loafer shoe and peeling off the sock.

She gently ran her fingers around the foot and ankle, creating a new-to-me tingling sensation. Between thumb and forefinger she squeezed in several spots and then located the protrusion where the ankle continued mending even now approaching seven months.

"Ooops!" I uttered.

"Still healing I see?"

"My grandfather's ham radio station"

"Tender when you put force on that spot, but mostly I'm OK and forget about it."

Carole gently placed the now sock and shoeless right foot back onto the heavy shag carpet, jumped in one smooth motion back to her feet and resumed the next to me position on the bed.

"There is no room in my plan for you being a jock," she restarted. "Acalanes has an aggressive basketball program; it is my suggestion you not consider going out for the team. Put it behind you."

It was that *trust me* tone and look on her face which I had earlier encountered.

"Actually, playing high school basketball never entered my mind. New York state has a program encouraging those between 12 and 15 to play first at a local, then county and finally in a state-wide tournament. How five regulars and two spares got to the finals last season remains a blur to me. It was just the luck of the draw that allowed us that far while much better pickup teams lost to entrants we would never meet."

"Interesting, but I have a different kind of sport in mind for us. You might deliver that chain and engraved basketball here with you on your next visit; it sounds like something you would like to keep for a lifetime. It will be safer here than in your home."

The tone was once again trust me but the words did not register as her real intent. Even *next visit* failed to set off my alarms as she patted my right knee rising to walk towards a working desk the length of a wall.

"Meals?" she began. "Several choices here, but I need to learn what you eat, how often, and about snack foods. Firstly, I eat mostly fruits, nuts and vegetables, but you are still a growing young man and I suspect meat is part of your family fare?"

I nodded agreement as Miss Efficient lifted a note pad and pencil from her desk.

"So? Speak to me!"

Creating a menu was not part of my day-to-day life cycle; that's why I had a mother. That thought diverted me from the assigned task and I asked

what seemed like a serious question, "Your mom - Hilda - doesn't she do meal planning?"

This set Carole off in a thigh-slapping demonstration of the depth of her humor once aroused. The raucous sound continued fully thirty seconds, her entire body shook and at the end she was dabbing her face with a tissue to dry tears.

"Hilda? Meals? Surely you jest, kind sir! I don't want to be diverted from my original question, but no, Hilda does not participate in meal planning. In fact she seldom participates in meal eating - with me present at least. Now, what and when?"

As promptly confirmed, the Caldecott residence on this night contained Carole and I, and at the end of a household intercom system someone named Gracie who apparently served as chief cook and bottle washer. I would later discover Gracie had a partner named George who was responsible for the gardens plus general maintenance. They resided in a detached three-bedroom 80-year-old adobe building originally built by Carole's great-grandfather as the first permanent residence on the multiple-thousand acre ranch.

"Now - meals attended to, and Gracie will deliver the requested snack foods for my fridge," pointing to a metal container in an alcove of her bedroom that I had also not yet visited. "So how about we take a hike to the top of the hill while there is still daylight and I'll show you my granddad's ham radio station. Your ankle OK for that?"

She pointed at the doorway, crooking two fingers in a move I instantly recognized from a Bogart and Bacall movie I could not name. Walking behind her I was struck by how complex the interior of this home differed from the impressive but rather austere Mexican brick seen through tangled vegetation when outside. Not Henry J Kaiser's I thought silently as we walked through a series of archway interconnected rooms, each fitted out for a specific purpose such as a library briefly glimpsed. 'This place has real class to it, totally different from the Kaiser compound', wandered through my mind.

"One last time, your ankle can stand a walk up there?" indicating a pathway winding mostly higher through carefully maintained native fruit trees, roses and sub-tropical plants I could not name.

"My grandfather's ham radio station"

"Do I have a choice here?"

"Not this time," Carole answered taking my left hand and starting us on the hike. As I would later discover, her great-grandfather had begun the project of creating a watering system down the hillside and the following generations had expanded it so that by 1953 several hundred acres of elevated and normally tinder-dry hillside survived green during the traditional April to October bone-dry weather pattern. Our walk up was a veritable sub-tropical forest jaunt with trees, vines and hundreds of flowering plants, creating an archway alongside and over the stoned pathway. Inside the walk area you saw no visible horizon and perhaps only at high-noon sunshine filtered through to ground level. It would therefore be with complete astonishment after rounding a final bend and directly in front on open-ground stood an almost exact replica of the adobe-style home where Gracie and George lived. Only this one was surrounded by a tall security fence and within the protected region an array of nearly a dozen steel and wooden towers dwarfed the adobe building. Just before we rounded the last turn, Carole had again grasped my hand. "Now - close your eyes and I will lead and tell you when to open them again!"

"Open now," she instructed. The building, towers and what I would later count to be 91 separate antennas, was a ham radio enthusiast's fantasy world; HAMland before Walt Disney created his non-ham version in Anaheim several years hence.

Carole dropped my hand, located a key to unlock the gate, and inside the perimeter we trooped; me gawking, she focused on getting us into the adobe building. Dusk was rapidly descending and through now open skies above the building the new moon wedge glistened behind rapidly flitting San Francisco coastal fog off-shore wind driven eastward to overhead, where it would dissipate above the desert valleys below.

A second key unlocked a massive steel door and stepping inside an automatic sensor switched on perimeter lights revealing more radio equipment than I had ever seen in one room during my years of interest in the hobby. There would turn out to be three such rooms, plus a fully-equipped kitchen, several bedrooms with multiple bunks, two bathrooms and a

closed room separated with an identical massive steel door to the one we first entered.

“Take it in - all of it. We’ll stay for 30 minutes but tomorrow you can come back with me and play on those radio things,” she pointing at an array of the very latest, newest in the world of electronics. She stood with me for perhaps five minutes as I stared and pondered how to even turn each piece on and then tapping me on the shoulder pointing at the inside steel door walked on her own in that direction. “I’ll be in there until we head back down,” she half-explained, using yet another large key to gain entry. It seemed likely my imagination but I thought, as the lights inside came on, I briefly glimpsed a massive table covered with - no; certainly not? - partially completed jigsaw puzzles?

Chapter Four

John Senior

Leaving the radio building, Carole used a telephone style handset to push one number and advise someone - Gracie as it turned out - "ten minutes from now." Turning to me while double checking the door locks, she volunteered, "The lights will shut off in five minutes after detecting no movement inside. Our pathway down is now lit with bulbs you probably did not realize were there. Let's go eat Mexican!"

Downhill would-be actually more of an ankle strain than up; the combination of gravity and the slope placing pressure on the still healing break being the culprit. I was starting to limp as we approached the last 100 yards of trekking and Carole instinctively turned around at the instant when I had stopped briefly to lift my right leg to try flexing the ankle.

"When was the last time a competent doctor examined it?" she demanded; *trust me* written all over her face.

My answer could be minutes long or brief; out of self-defence I chose number two. "Probably too long," I answered through slightly clenched teeth, while placing the foot gingerly back on the ground.

"Tomorrow - in the morning - you and I see Doctor Scott."

It was not as if I had detached from my mother's always caring attention but Carole's feminine approach left no wiggle room. *Trust Me* was being elevated to a new level.

Our first full meal together would turn out to be a new form of love affair that would remain with me for the balance of life. Real, honest authentic, Mexican delicacies prepared at Carole's instruction by Gracie who, in fact, was born Juanita. Gracie and George were Caldecott family nick-names copied from the popular George Burns and Gracie Allen show

business team. George answered to his Americanized nick-name but in fact his parents had christened him Jorge; close but not the same.

The table, set into an alcove area with maximum comfortable seating for four, was only steps way from the massive and superbly equipped kitchen, although a two-foot thick hand wrought wall completely isolated Carole and I from Gracie and her helper; George. Forty-five minutes after taking my assigned seat, my stomach had accepted more food - whether by weight or bulk - than perhaps any meal in memory. Carole ate far more selectively than I, insisting "at least sample each dish - there are five different selections here; no two are alike". I did as instructed; ultimately deciding corn husk wrapped tortillas were my favorite. I said so and Carole urged Gracie to "pop in for a minute, por favour" allowing me to compliment her on the meal.

I did that with great seriousness and approaching compliments which Carole, deciding had gone beyond the pale, thanked Gracie, thereby dismissing her. Gracie had reacted to my compliments by smiling broadly, wrapping her hands together and then grasping and twisting the large apron she wore between her hands. Carole would later advise me, "twisting of the apron is a visual sign she is about to start crying out of happiness; I merely wished to avoid that."

"I do again tomorrow for Senor?" had been her last verbalization as she passed back through the archway.

Carole dismissed herself with a curt "back in a min" while I was sampling a dessert dish Gracie called Fried Ice Cream knowing only that if this all ended tomorrow, it had been the best chapter-one of any book I had lived or read to that time.

Chapter Five

Carole's Story

She had returned after several minutes announcing, resuming her seat, "Tomorrow morning, 10AM, Scotty." It took me a minute of thought to work out Doctor had been eliminated from her advisory. She was now hand-leading us up consecutive spiral staircases to her, rather *our*, room. Approaching it, she launched into what I would much later decide was a carefully rehearsed series of statements.

She began with, "I understand your concern about being here not only without a parent but sharing my bedroom - and bed. Your concern is in point of fact a positive for your game. So here, in synopsis, is why this is acceptable.

"Firstly, Hilda is off someplace - I know not and care not where. She leads a busy social life mostly to flaunt her latest trinkets and clothing to an adoring group of wanna-be's whom she treats to week-long trips to Baja or Tahoe or God knows where. She is the female version of Daddy Warbucks spending grandfather's investment returns as fast as she can. Only Daddy Warbucks - that's from Little Orphan Annie - was basically a good person and Hilda barely rates 1 on a scale of 10 in that classification. And then there is John junior - who may at this moment be in bed with three whores or perhaps five in Habana, or in Las Vegas with one of his favored playthings. Again, I do not know where he is and care even less than with Hilda. Are you with me so far?" We had both resumed a sitting position at the foot of her gigantic bed.

I was following her, but experiencing total mental disconnection. My parents were straight up and down middle-class Americans who not only worked for a living but struggled with day-to-day challenges. Carole's

Free, White & 16!

parents apparently did not work or be challenged except by their own amusement decisions. I smiled and uttered a rather weak "yes - I am listening." Actually, I was racing to connect the dots or make the jig-saw puzzle pieces fit together.

"Secondly," she resumed, "I have an older sister whom I never refer to as sis or sister, but rather address, whether she is here - which is almost never - or away, as simply *Her*. Her has a given name; Suzanne. Her last name is now Thompson because she married at age 18 and we'll get back to Her much later. Still with me?"

This time I just nodded, for Carole had positioned herself after directing me on how to place my legs so we almost faced one another at the end of the bed and I was quickly learning that when conducting a serious discussion her eyes would be fully focused on the subject. Over time, if my eyes might wander during such a discussion, she would stop in mid-stream with an emphatic reminder; "Look at me!"

"Thirdly, I was ten when my grandfather - that being John Senior - died; Her being thirteen. Because Senior's father, in our house simply John-Original, had the good luck, wisdom or guts to lay claim to more than 3,000 acres of virgin and perhaps at the time worthless barren land running from the top of the coastal range immediately above us down through what is today Claremont and Orinda, we as a family live on an appreciating asset. All of you immigrants arrive seeking land and business opportunities and here we sit on both. Are you still with me - number four is the more important one."

There was a stomach growling and to my surprise Carole either did not hear it or was not going to be distracted. "Yes - I am trying to stay with you."

"Four - the FIRST big one. John Senior's assets when he died had been rather carefully arranged into a series of trusts. The total valuation, if *all* of the trusts ended up with John junior, or Hilda, or 'Her' or me, would exceed seventy million dollars - those would be 1948 dollars. With the galloping local economy, new subdivisions announced weekly fuelled by the arrival of people like the Coopers, that rather massive number will double

Carole's Story

by 1958, if not prior. In other words, the Caldecotts live on a gold mine that requires neither digging nor labor to harvest nuggets. Now, Bobby - your reaction to sharing the same birthday and a bed with an intellectually gifted and financially well-off girl?"

I was now perspiring and Carole noticed. While I was mentally framing a response to her question she abruptly rose, walked to a wall-mounted control dialling the room temperature down several degrees. And returning, sat even closer to my now elevated temperature 170-pound body.

"Yes?" she urged.

"This seems a bit like *The Great Gatsby*," I began. She nodded, understanding fully my reference. I would later discover this classic and thousands more in the family's library alcove and learn Carole's favorite personal habit was reading novels. Her eye-to-eye contact now sharpened; there was no dodging the question.

"My first puzzlement involves why you are sharing this with me - I have the supposition this is not common street gossip. Or is that Number Five, still to come?"

"Good answer. Okay - number five. Her hired an attorney outside the family's normal legal providers to go through all of the trusts hoping to find some way that she would not be forced to wait until she was 20 - the age stated in Senior's will in support of the trusts - before she could get her grubby mitts on Her full share; around seventeen million. Yes - I am coming to your question - why *you* should hear this very personal information. Senior's will provides what the trusts define as an annual share of appreciated value to be doled out to Hilda, John Junior, Her and myself; kind of like receiving interest on the interest. Hilda and junior also had direct access to some, but not all, of the principal amounts in several trusts created for the full family; Senior very correctly foresaw how Hilda and his son would react when they suddenly had floating accounts of more than five million each. Hilda, as perhaps I explained, promptly turned my care over to a housekeeper after packing me off to a boarding school for girls in Berkeley. And that step gave her freedom to come and go - mostly go - when and where she pleased. Her had the same fate but a different school.

Junior promptly acquired a DC-3 and had the inside customized as a party wagon. He sometimes is home for my birthday - not often - and rarely for Christmas. At any rate, until I was 20, according to the trust, until Her was 20 - both of us would have to be content to live on around \$100,000 from the annual share of appreciated value. Without asking for a response, my assumption is your father might have an annual salary of perhaps a third of that and he has an entire household to fund. I have only myself and seemingly \$100,000 in 1953 would tide me over. In fact it will - I place more than half of each year's interest back into the principal account simply because it makes future year's interest payments even larger. A penny saved is a penny earned, yes?"

"I need something to drink; quickly, please?"

"Soft drink? Water? You do not consume alcohol - I hope!"

"Just water; no to alcohol; not now, hopefully not ever."

It was just another bedroom alcove away, adjacent to her ensuite which had not yet been shown to me.

"No ice in here - some in my next-alcove fridge. Ice?"

Taking the pewter cup and swallowing virtually all of the room temperature contents, I took several deep breaths and found her eyes. She had already focused on my head awaiting an answer to the last question. To allow me more time to consider the response I threw a feint. "Can you repeat the last question once again?"

"Your reaction to sharing the same birthday and a bed with an intellectually gifted and financially well-off girl?"

Which caught me totally unprepared; the last question I recalled had mentioned pennies.

"If this is a part of my testing by you, I'm probably ill-prepared for the exam, because my suspicion is we haven't reached the real topic yet. Am I correct?"

Carole rose again after sliding her hand down my right leg as far as the kneecap, and began pacing the floor in front of me, but leaving her eyes riveted on mine as she moved.

Carole's Story

"OK - number five was important, but each one that follows escalates that. I'm really not sure how much further this should go tonight. Between Gracie's dinner and all of this Great Gatsby dialogue, I am concerned you may turn out to be an unpleasant person to have in bed. Any chance that between stomach overload and mental fatigue you will make sleeping next to me a bad experience?"

"Excuse me? That is a serious concern at this instant?"

"It is. There is a Gatsby chapter break here - what follows becomes far more difficult for me to relate and frankly, Bobby, I suggest we save it for tomorrow."

"Sleeping in bed with you or any girl - that is - young lady? This will be a first-time experience for me and at this very instant what I most desire is to be held snugly and allowed to go to sleep; assuming I can do that."

Carole resumed a position sitting on the shag carpet from which she had diagnosed my right ankle. "Scotty - Doctor Scott - allows me some mild sleeping pills and they are neither addictive nor have side effects. I might take one; I suggest you do as well. By being held snugly you are suggesting what?"

"I'm a tad confused and overloaded with so much information; I think I mean could we lay next to one another and touch but not in a way that is a prelude to something more serious?"

"As in having conjugal relations?"

"That's what I meant - I didn't want to simply say *have sex* and for that split-second could not recall conjugal."

"Another point for Bobby. I am here, I am vulnerable, and I have already suggested earlier we *might* ultimately have sex. That you are not allowing your male hormones to rush that point is a positive for your test!"

"So - a shower or bath now," I asked, "or in the morning?"

"The shower I have in mind involves both of us and if we try that tonight, conjugal is likely to become an issue. Let's just strip and climb into the bed. We'll start the morning with a shower, okay?"

"Suits me."

"Ok - then what do you wear when you are in bed? I wear either nothing or perhaps my panties. Tonight I prefer the panties but there is no way I am going to spend a night in this stupid bra!" And with that Carole began stripping, tossing her discards onto a nearby chair. There she stood all 5' 7" of her 15+ years, wearing pink cotton panties and nothing else. I stumbled to get my clothing off as well, ultimately tossing it onto the same chair.

"Jockey shorts and an obvious, enlarged, penis? Into bed sailor!"

Carole headed for one side, leaving me with the other; on her side were a number of bedside items. I then remembered; "the sleeping pills?"

"Let's try it without them. Come on, closer to the middle. We can't snuggle when you are way over there!"

It was the next to last sentence she vocalized until morning. I moved closer until my front side was barely touching her back, she facing away from me. After perhaps a minute she said the final line of the day.

"Move up closer, directly against me and please use your right hand to cup around my top breast."

In a matter of minutes we were both soundly asleep, with my penis enlarged beyond anything I could remember.

Chapter Six

Wake Up Sleepy Head! It's Saturday!

I did not react to the alarm, uncertain whether the music was a radio or my imagination. But quickly it became apparent I was holding the soft tummy of a female person who moved just enough to dig her bottom into my crotch.

"Welcome to Saturday, my Bobby!" with considerable expression. That we had laid my front to her back side, and my arm draped around her body for something longer than eight hours, was a total shock to me. It was much more than simply a first; it was one of the best sleeps I could remember and I said so.

Carole wiggled slightly, just enough to turn her brown eyes into my face. "Me as well; let's do that again!"

"Like tonight?"

"Or we should consider a mid-afternoon nap as well," she said in partial jest, punctuated when her right hand slid under my arm to rub the front of my now dormant Jockey shorts. This created an instant response causing Carole to giggle and leap from the bed. "Last one in the shower has to make the bed!"

That would be me, slow poke that I was. Her naked butt disappeared after her panties flew across the room to the waiting chair and the unmistakable sounds of a shower running quickly followed. I was not in a rush, and perhaps a minute, even two, went by as my shorts came off and slowly I sauntered towards the open alcove where shower steam was flowing outward in a rush. Through the moisture-laden glass sides I could make out a naked mature woman fully lathered from head to toe. I was not comfortable appearing at the see-through door, but gulped twice and stood there. As the warm water cleansed her hair, then head and eyes flowing down a near

perfect body, she reopened her eyes exclaiming "Get in here sleepy head, there is room for two!"

A sudden inspiration spoke for me. "Maybe two - but I'm not sure this will fit in there," pointing down at my fully extended straight-as-an-arrow penis.

Carole doubled over laughing, creating a quick exodus of the remaining lather on her lower body as she pushed the door open from the inside.

"Get in here - Nurse Carole can handle that problem!"

I obeyed; it was a trust me line once again.

Several new-to-me revealing lessons followed over the ensuing five, make that ten, minutes. One was that self-excitation was not nearly as satisfying as someone doing it for or to you. Another was that being clean both inside and out was important to a happy partner. The third and final for this episode in my life involved how, by following step-by-step instruction, a female can reach ecstasy without two bodies becoming one. Oh yes - what this did for both of us was to seriously pique our interest in sharing one another's physical frame whenever the opportunity arose. And I still had no idea why I was here or what Carole's *Grand Plan*, as she now labelled it, might be. Possibly I could even pass French 1 if I hung around her long enough.

Breakfast was pushing 8:30; Carole had instructed George to be prepared to drive us down the hill to Doctor Scott's office; yes, there was that damned right ankle concern, which seemed to alarm her far more than me. "I wish you to be in perfect physical form by April 20th," was her explanation. This being mid-September, the odds seemed reasonable. But as I was learning, Carole left very little - if anything - to chance and Doctor Scott would advise us what corrections might be required.

The family garage was another surprise; one of dozens that would intrude into my mind over the coming weeks and months. "Pick a car for today," she instructed, while pushing a button that simultaneously opened multiple doors on a building one could not even detect from the front of the house. Six opening doors revealed eleven vehicles including a brand new, dealer-delivered and never otherwise driven, 1953 Chevrolet Corvette.

Wake Up Sleepy Head! It's Saturday!

"Not that one," she quickly quipped, noticing my wide-eyed fixation; "there are three of us, remember?"

"But *this* is only being released to the public next month," I stammered; "How is it here already?"

Her answer was a single word. "Money".

"But the advance reviews..." I began.

"Are absolutely putrid," she completed for me. "This is a bit like my grandfather's rare stamp collection which I shall one day show you. You are looking at serial number 007 and Chevrolet will make each new model better. Someday this one will be worth fifty thou and oh yes - for \$3,500 I bought it myself."

"Your parents - ah - Hilda, John?"

"Don't even know it is here," she finished for me once again.

The heck with '9' I instantly decided; Carole was a 10+!

While I continued staring at 007, she walked towards a 1948 Ford 'Woody' wagon. And George appeared.

"Miss Carole," he began.

"Si Jorge; John Senior's car please."

The short trip into what passed for downtown Old Orinda was in silence; five minutes of self-absorbing thoughts. George, or Jorge as she had addressed him, knew where to stop and park, and hopped out to open the door for Miss Carole to exit the essentially brand new wagon. I made a mental note to glance at the odometer on the way home; after five years garaging it still retained a new car odor.

As we walked into the almost hidden Private entrance with a small brass sign announcing Dr Scott, she again read my thoughts. "Under 500 miles; Senior rode in it only once after having been ordered just before he died. That trip was in his casket. I miss him terribly," and tears appeared on her cheeks, which she did not dab away.

The very small front area was vacant and contained a pair of chairs, desk and receptionist's desk. Not even a file cabinet. Carole headed directly for a single door, knocked, and we heard a booming voice respond.

"Entrez-vous Miss Carole!" We did just that.

Doctor Scott was a man in his early 50s, perhaps older, a full-head of bushy grey-black hair, and only moved from his well-worn, overstuffed grey chair as we entered. Carole made the introductions and the doctor greeted me with a vigorous handshake, smiled, and turned to Carole. "A broken ankle you say?" Returning to me, his eyes bore through my head as if x-raying my mind. That he was not to be trifled with was obvious. I explained the injury and Carole was already speaking to me with hand signals to raise my right leg, which I did obediently. As I completed the end of my tale she had my shoe and sock off, lifting my leg to rest on the edge of the desk. I would never have dared do that on my own, but Scotty, as she called him, seemed pleased with her assistance.

As he came around the desk to inspect, Carole reviewed her own test of my ankle the previous afternoon. The doctor listened intently to every word Carole said and following her lead repeated the same examination.

"Oh my...", I uttered when he found the same points between his thumb and forefinger as she had done, less of course my tingling response which had been to Carole's feminine fingers. We talked further about the way it had been treated immediately after the break, how long it had been in a cast, and what attention I subsequently received when the device was removed.

Returning to his desk, he bent over, placing his chin into elbow-supported cupped hands and began. "Bob - is it?"

Carole corrected him; "Bobby."

"Bobby - there is no decision until we send you off for a new set of x-rays; I'd say Kaiser Permanente in Walnut Creek early the coming week. I'll write out what I require, you show up there and we'll see what the interior really looks like." Then he turned to Carole.

"Young lady; why do I feel as if this is not simply some school chum you have dragged me down from home on a Saturday morning to inspect, although I am not complaining; for you I am available 24 hours seven days."

Carole laughed softly, reaching forward by standing slightly to rub the older man's arm. "Your perception is once again spot-on," she began.

Wake Up Sleepy Head! It's Saturday!

"Bobby may well be *the one* we have spoken about in absentia for two years. I have not explained very much to him this far; just the basics of my family quadrangle. But it is important to me that he be in good health and have no lingering infirmities by, say, April coming."

The doctor refocused on me, breathed deeply several times and began a brief lecture to stay with me until my dying day.

"Young man, in every life there is a fleeting opportunity to locate the perfect companion for our time on earth. I delivered Carole when she was born, I have been here for her and, until John Senior passed, the entire family. Of the more than five hundred infants delivered by these hands," raising them above the desk and lightly touching the fingertips together, "Carole Ann Caldecott is the most unique and special. If I had delivered but one child, and Carole had been that baby, I could have retired with full honors. You will have *me* to answer to if you disappoint her in any way!"

And he turned again to Carole.

"Miss Caldecott, it appears the ankle in question may have been reset at an incorrect angle, then complicated by removing the plaster cast two weeks prematurely. I believe you told me he did this in New York State; I thought more of their skills back east. So here is what will happen if the Kaiser x-rays come back as I anticipate. First we will re-break his ankle, which is much less of a challenge than it sounds. Then it will be reset, one or more removable pins will be inserted to ensure it stays together properly while healing, and a new cast for a prescribed length of time will be installed. I can see in your eyes the timeline concern; from start to finish around two months. That is well ahead of April 20th, 1954. Questions?"

Carole broke into a broad smile before responding. "Can he take showers with the new cast on?"

Doctor Scott stared briefly at her determining the *real* question, and then laughed heartily. "Yes, of course, but no baths. Which leads me to suggest you may wish Bobby to leave the room while I broach a final subject?"

Carole did not hesitate. "I expect the question. Bobby stays."

"My dear, several months ago you were instructed on the importance of technique for measuring and recording your day-to-day ovulation status.

Are you doing that - taking a temperature, checking cervix mucus discharge, logging the results, and drawing the graph I taught you?"

Again Carole did not hesitate but in my mind a heavy San Francisco fog had dropped down and they might have been speaking French - heaven forbid - and it would have been no more intelligible.

"I have nearly three months charted. I am very-very precise month to month; it is the 14th to 16th day each of my months, varying only in length from 6 to 20 hours."

"Very good. I won't repeat what you are not-to-do immediately before or within that time frame. Respect it, because there will be a major derailment of your plan if but one egg is located by just one aggressive sperm. And as always, you have my contact numbers and if the unthinkable accidentally occurs, well, we'll somehow cope with it."

He rose - a signal, I thought, but the fog had now descended down to my apparently still-damaged ankle and if there was going to be a test of what was just said when we arrived back outside, I would flunk. Egg? Sperm?

Carole and Doctor Scott met at the edge of the desk as I groped to return sock and shoe to my right foot; they hugged and whispered into each other's ear words I did not detect. And he bade us good-bye noting only, "I will see you again probably next Saturday Bobby - after the x-rays arrive." It would be a trip back to Carole's I could not recall and a walk from the garage that my mind said did not happen before the fog began to lift.

Chapter Seven

Hilltop

"11:15," Carole announced, as we left the stored and protected vehicles. "By putting lunch off for an hour or so, there is time for you to become better acquainted with John Senior's favorite spot on the entire earth; the ham station atop the Berkeley Hills."

My instant response was a reflection of a newly-learned concern for my ankle. I said so. "Carole - the hike to the top?"

"Three options. First, George drives us through the tunnel back to Grizzly Peak Boulevard and from there to the private gated entrance on the west side. Two, you walk, because even if it pains you on the way up or down, within a couple of weeks Scotty will rebuild your ankle anyhow. And three - which will be a new revelation to you - we ride the tram up!"

Stopping dead in my tracks as we approached a side kitchen door, "The tram??"

Carole was facing me, placing her arms around my waist and barely inches nose to nose. In a very soft voice she all but whispered, "John Senior built a monorail tram from just behind the garage to the top immediately after the war. It is hidden and in last night's dusk you didn't notice the rail just south of the pathway. Come, I'll show you!" and with that her lips found mine for something longer than a peck, but shorter than a French kiss. My attempt to prolong the gesture brought a push-away and smile. "Nap-time. Remember?"

The engineering skills of John Senior, and his father John-Original, were plastered all over the extensive acreage. It was however - and would continue to be for many months to come - always a new 'Oh My Gosh' when by chance or Carole's planning a new aspect would be unveiled. The tram

was an early surprise and some time later during a visit by my own father, a graduate Civil Engineer by trade, he would be motivated to take notes while shooting an 8mm camera through a complete roll of film. Behind the car garage, camouflaged by a wall of vines covering a 10-foot trellis, rested a four-seat tram-car obediently always ready. The railway track extended up the hill at a significant inclination, while the car was propelled by an endless wire rope powered by an electric motor stout enough to lift a large crane.

"Senior built this mostly because he, like you, was becoming challenged by the walk. He completed it in '46; I was eight at the time," Carole said with a soft tone to her voice. "I vividly replay when it was first functional and how he selected me to ride to the top with him. It was a grand adventure. What we neglected to do was take photos or use a movie camera to record the historic event. I regret that."

I was unsure what to do next; we were standing just outside the cage, as Carole called the riding car.

"Get in silly. I'll throw the switch and then teach you how simple it is to operate. Senior taught me on that initial ride and I have never forgotten."

We sat side-by-side with a hand on my knee, the motor whirled and before we reached the top her head was on my shoulder. I would later work out she had been replaying in her mind that first ride up on the lap of her much-revered grandfather. The controls were simply a regulator of the speed and an emergency direction switch should you get part way up - or down - and change your mind. At the top-end, also well disguised by a tall trellis laden with watered native vines, the tram simply stopped.

"Now, this is a weekend and I expect to find members of the Orinda DX Club here, so be prepared; virtually all are old enough to be your grandfather and they will only accept you as an equal after a year or two of being with them. You don't happen to carry your FCC license with you I suppose?"

I did not and answered truthfully.

"A formality I am told. There are a few things you should understand before we go in, and yes, I see several cars parked on the far side. First

of all, in John Senior's will the land this building sits on, the building itself, and all of the equipment inside less something someone has brought from home, belongs to me. His trusts are complex and in time you will be exposed to at least my portion, and probably Her's, but beyond the trusts there were individual bequeaths to family members. Her, for example, was given the title to a piece of land on Lake Tahoe's Nevada side Senior won in a poker game. Junior was given a hangar at the Alameda airport and when he is here that is where he parks his party-DC3. And so on. Me? Well, my list is longer, because frankly I was not only his favorite, but the only one who showed any interest in what intrigued him. So I own this land, this ham station building, a rather extensive stamp collection and so on. I tell you this because while he arranged for the local ham radio club to have a facility here for an indefinite period of time, they are here because I allow them to be. I have no problem with any of this; ham radio was grandfather's most prized activity and what he wrote in his will I will honor forever. But - and this is the important part - nobody who uses this facility, which is rent-free and I pay their electricity costs - ever forgets that a girl barely 15, not a ham, is their mentor. OK?"

I was absorbing every word; another Oh My Gosh on top of a tram wow! I delayed a few seconds too long for Carole.

"OK??"

"OK," I began - a stupid response I realized later, but I did recover quickly. "That means - I assume - that if you take me inside and announce I am here to be one of them they will, perhaps reluctantly, accept my presence?"

"You've got it. Money talks, and so on."

My next response was apparently spot-on. "I prefer to think of this as John Senior's legacy being carried on under the supervision of a person whom he selected with great care."

Now Carole grabbed my waist, pulling me full-stop against her body, kissing me with not only longevity, but creating a new sensation never previously experienced; a foreign tongue inside my mouth. We lingered in that position for what seemed too long or perhaps only half-long enough, a

later point of discussion, and when she finally pushed us apart both cheeks were wet from tears.

"Let me use your sleeve," she said, already wiping her face, "and we'll go inside. When you've had enough of these cranky old codgers come get me in my room and we'll go back down for a Gracie lunch." And we headed through the unlocked door.

I lasted an hour and a few minutes. My introduction by Carole to the group of six then in attendance had been met with complete silence; nobody reacted to me in any way. Before that hour ended, three more appeared and entered. Each had a special interest, and there was an apparent pecking order assigning priority access to each of the individual pieces of equipment; later arrivals higher on that non-printed order quickly replaced others who had arrived before them. I was not comfortable in their atmosphere and basically stood behind first one and then another, watching their experienced minds and fingers manipulate equipment I had only seen in two-dimension from advertisements in radio magazines. Today Bobby was an observer, not an operator, and whether Carole had introduced me or not was basically making no dent in their acceptance of my presence. Carole had of course disappeared through her locked private door and yes, she was totally focused on not one but as I would later learn seven in-process jigsaw puzzles on a table large enough to have been used for two-times The Last Supper.

Announcing my readiness to head back down with a knock on her closed door, she promptly appeared, fingering a Polaroid Model 95 Land Camera. "Before we leave, find an empty operating position and sit down with earphones on; I want a picture or two of your first serious visit here."

I obliged in front of a piece of equipment perhaps older than I - she pointed at it, indicating I should sit there - contrary to the essentially brand new hardware filling the rooms. She composed and shot three Polaroid images, told me to sit tight and waited the mandatory minute or so for each to develop and print. One got approval and she motioned for me to stand up to follow her. I was learning - slowly - there was *always* a plan.

"I have one question," I said as we closed the outer door behind us.

"No, first, let me say thank-you."

"For what?" I questioned aloud.

"There is one puzzle I have been stymied finishing for months; 12 pieces out, 12 holes and nothing fit any spot; the size and shape would be correct, but the colors were not. I had decided the pieces left were not for that puzzle when our visit with Scotty today intruded. Suppose these 12 are for this puzzle, but I had 12 others in the wrong position? And that was it. Just like your ankle, it was more or less fit together but not in the correct spots. So thank you for the lesson today! Now the puzzle is complete and I can move on."

"Glad to be of inspiration," I smiled back, "even if my ankle was the motivation!"

"Now - your question?"

"Ah yes - inside the ham building there are many pieces of equipment which only became available during the last 6 to 12 months. With Senior passing in 1948, how is that possible, as you said all but a few loner pieces belong to you and the station?"

"Very well done; good observation and I wondered how long it would take you to work that one out. Senior in his various trusts set aside a sizeable block of AT&T stock which, of course, pays dividends. And those dividends, paid annually, are by me as a choice earmarked for maintaining the modern state of the club's equipment. I know it might be considered frivolous, and in fact Her and I disagree vehemently on this among many other issues. But Senior wanted it this way in his will and while I could in fact change the decision, I elect not to do so. All that would do is make my personal annual interest-on-interest account larger and frankly, I believe the new equipment does more good than additional zeros in my account. Any problem with that?"

We were back at the tram cage and what I wanted to do was hold Carole close and stroke her medium-long hair. I stepped closer and did so. "You are in fact the best person, the most generous and brightest human being, I have ever known. I am so pleased to be with you!" and she responded by hugging me as well for a very long moment. When we separated, massive tears were flowing down both cheeks once again.

Free, White & 16!

“Gracie expects us in five minutes or I would push you to the ground and rip your clothing off right here,” she responded while stepping into the tram cage. Life, if this is what it was going to be, was never likely to be dull with Carole.

Chapter Eight

You WILL speak French!

Gracie's instructed lunch consisted of a huge platter filled with freshly prepared fruit, vegetables, Mexican rolls with an accented-flavor that would soon become a new addiction to me, and iced-tea by the pitcher. The latter was a coincidence I thought, until I said so and Carole reminded me of the cleaning lady who appears at 1016 Sunnybrook each Thursday.

"I do have some advance knowledge of what your family eats *and* drinks," was her only comment in response.

"Now - French. In the Study we will find this first week's French class tutorial paper, and two Webcor wire recorders. On one I have recorded first the French sentence in English and immediately following the same statement in my best French, which will improve steadily, although at Mrs Bowditch's Girls School I did in fact have two semesters of introduction to the language. And the second Webcor; simple to operate, especially for someone with your ham skills. You will listen to the previously recorded lines, use the instant-repeat button to re-listen as many times as you need, and then pick up the microphone for the second and following the written tutorial vocalize the same sentence, thus recording it. If you feel inclined push record again and repeat the same line a second or even third time. There are twelve new sentences or statements each week and when you are finished I will rejoin you for a critique. Questions?"

Another Oh-My-Gosh. Carole was actually *serious* about tutoring me in French? My mind flitted over nap-time and once again answering her had taken too long.

"Questions??"

I was quicker this time. "Just one - *you* will be off doing what while I attempt this feat?"

"Are you going to go through our lives together keeping track of me all the time?" It was said with more than a hint of Lauren Bacall to Bogie in *Key Largo*.

"Oh no; not intended. I'm simply trying to work out how you spent your time before I arrived Friday afternoon!"

Carole smiled, stroking my forehead with a degree of tenderness. "The grand plan; it is never far from my conscious thoughts. To be direct to your question, I am going into John's office where I have some matters to attend to. You might as well accept this is a large place that does not run itself. With John and Hilda gone, I'm in charge." And she paused just long enough to take a short, deep breath. "Actually, when one or the other - seldom both - are here, I still run this Hacienda, amigo." She bent to kiss me lightly on the forehead before turning for the alcove opening. "Parlez-vous francais, Robaire!"

Thirty minutes later, I was up to sentence 8 and rapidly losing the modicum of confidence present at the beginning. I could replay my own attempts with the second machine's instant repeat button - which, in fact, because the thin wire had to rewind, count to itself, start and then replay was not all that instant. In between those quiet reset periods every now and again I detected Carole's voice wafting in from a distant alcove and once or twice I imagined - surely I was imagining - her saying *Bobby*. It was just after 2 o'clock when number 12 was on the wire. Lacking instruction, I simply sat still for perhaps five minutes, absorbing the contents of the Study. One wall in the room contained several sets of dark mahogany doors and obviously something stored behind each. I rose from the work table, turning to leave and locate Carole, when something gleamed through two doors which were not completely tight; a somewhat familiar sliver of reflected light. Ah yes - a television screen, my mind answered. It was in fact the first one I had observed and that seemed a bit bizarre given the number of apparent rooms or alcoves already visited. Carole does not have one in her room, next occurred to me; or if she does it is well hidden.

You WILL speak French!

An elaborate sound system did occupy one of the alcove sub-walls of her quarters but less the small alarm-clock-radio at her bedside, consumer electronics were strangely absent for a residence which seemed to contain the very latest of everything else, including serial number 007 of the Chevrolet Corvette's inaugural run. I was considering heading to the slightly ajar cabinet doors to inspect the apparent TV set when Carole bounced into the room filled with smiles, throwing her arms around my shoulders and chest from behind. "Parlez-vous francais, Robaire?" she began.

"Oui, un peu," I forced myself to answer.

"Good boys get rewards," she chuckled. "Now, let me listen to Webcor number two; rewind it to the start please."

What followed was one of the more nerve-wracking experiences of my recent life. Carole was determined to be supportive, not critical, but my pronunciation was bordering on being like a poorly made Walter Katz Woody Woodpecker movie cartoon. Carole listened carefully to each of my attempts, made some sort of cryptic notes on a nearby legal pad, and fifteen minutes later turned to discover me with head in hands bent over in a semi-collapsed posture.

"The good news is you did try," she began. "The better news - this is week one and while you won't be raising your hand to answer questions next week, give me two or three weeks and you will be speaking at least first-term equivalency French. There is hope dear Bobby; I didn't expect much more so soon." And to reinforce her statement Carole removed both of my hands from below my chin and gently kissed each in turn.

"So - here are some options. There is the screening room with several hundred stored full-length films and with your skills we won't need George to load the projectors. Granddad insisted the room include a quality movie-theatre popcorn machine and there should be cold soft drinks and juices. I suppose we could take our clothes off and sit naked just for the experience! Number two, out in the gym there is equipment to do physical exercise, play badminton, or as might fit you better, shoot baskets. Now that I think about that choice, a hoop game of 21 might be OK, but badminton requires aggressive running back and forth and there is the issue of your

ankle. I don't want to damage it between now and Monday's x-rays! But a warning - I play it very seriously and the day you beat me will cause great displeasure. The first choice includes the option of being naked; the gym is probably not a choice for disrobing as George or Gracie often pass-through it on the way to their quarters. Comments, amigo?"

"I suggest we find a place to sit down, on the floor, and hold a pow-wow," I responded without hesitation.

"The floor? What happened to sitting on my - our - bed?"

"The floor, please; face to face."

"Why am I getting a nervous tummy? I never get nervous tummy. Tell me this is not going to be an unpleasant experience, please!"

"If anyone should be nervous, it would not be you. On the floor, knees to knees?"

"Alright Bobby; but at least let us go next door where there is a comfortable carpet; the 50-year old sun-cast tiles here in the Study are not comfortable to my bottom."

She took my hand in hers and led us into the next adjoining alcove which, as it turned out, had been John Senior's personal Study. "Here - on the carpet beneath the mounted ten-point buck John-Original shot on this property in 1890?" This wasn't helping me one bit in composing how the dialogue would begin. We sat down, not quite knees to knees until Carole readjusted herself. "OK - now we are touching, start." Carole, unlike fellow Acalanes' students, dressed in loose blouses and flowing skirts; a skin-tight, 4 inches above-the-knees skirt style was not her.

"During the past 22-plus hours I have lived a fantasy life; so much a fantasy that even I couldn't have created it in my mind. You are the most potent person on the face of planet Earth; I am totally absorbed by everything about you. And here is the tough part; if this ends tomorrow, I cannot imagine how to adjust to not having you nearby, even intimate. Do you understand my concerns?"

Carole responded by trying to lean forward to kiss my lips and fell out of balance against my chest. She was crying, not light tears, but large rolling drops of water with a heaving breast and deep gulps searching for

You WILL speak French!

oxygen. This lasted for what seemed an eternity, but in fact was less than a minute; then, with some effort she up-righted her body and took both my hands into her own, in her lap. Her near perfect face was covered with wetness while the eyes regained the sparkle I had come to love; yes, *love*. It was a verb not yet uttered by either of us.

"I can be overwhelming; I know that. And for another day's discussion, that is primarily because when attempting to get close to someone as a friend, I end up driving them away; they cannot handle the overload. That was my fear when you asked me to sit down for a pow-wow. Tell me you are not overloaded; merely overwhelmed?"

I unhooked a hand and with gentle fingers stroked her left cheek. "It is overwhelm, not overload. You are the biggest challenge of my life, but by trying harder, so far I've managed to stay up with you; most of the time. But tomorrow is Sunday and that means going home. 'Frankly My Dear', to quote from a 1938 movie we both know well, I do not want to go home. Not tomorrow, *not ever*. That is why we are sitting here - so I can reveal to you a plea. Help me work out how I can stay right here, *with you*, forever!"

Carole's knees buckled as she again rose towards me in a lunge, wrapping both arms plus legs around my sitting position body. Her sobs were very strong and her body was trembling as she whispered into my ear, "Then propose to me; ask me to marry you. Right here, right now!"

I did not hesitate. "Carole Ann Caldecott, will you marry Robert Britt Cooper Junior?"

If the prior tears had been heavy, they now turned into a torrent and her body jack-knifed, driving us onto the carpet in a hopeless entanglement. She did not cease sobbing for several minutes and we held each other as tightly as the non-uniform wrestling hold would allow. And then she responded, softly, barely above a whisper.

"Oh my, yes! But where the devil did Junior come from? We need to ditch that at the earliest opportunity!"

The response was classic Carole of course - into every ray of sunshine there is a tiny bit of rain hiding. "Junior? My father is RBC senior and it actually states Junior on my birth certificate. I'm confident with your

skills we can change anything that gets in our way. Oh yes, thank you for accepting!" Over her shoulder I confirmed we had been in this house, together, essentially alone, for 23 hours and three minutes. And now we were engaged.

What would follow on the floor of John Senior's former Study, perhaps as a symbol of how all of this fantasy became real, was the initial merging of two bodies, after which she shared with me, "I had promised myself that *before* this actually happened ... well ... I would delay until I was engaged. Thank you for waiting my Bobby!" For both of us, it would be a first-ever.

Chapter Nine

And your parents

Saturday dinner at the Caldecott Hacienda was another Gracie triumph; French cuisine that had Carole and I been in a classy Berkeley restaurant, would have set us back at least \$100 in 1953 dollars. Gracie was exuberant to be creating meals for someone other than she, Jorge and Carole and the look of her pleasure was enough to bring tears to my eyes. Carole noticed.

"Gracie has been with us for as long as I have been here. She is so loyal, so trustworthy that when I send her to local shops with George driving for groceries and supplies, she returns with an itemized receipt and change correct to the penny. She will serve you and I as well for as long as they remain capable; I figure another fifteen years at least before we - as master and mistress of The Hacienda - have to replace them. It will not be a pleasant day when it happens."

The statement, uttered as we climbed through the second spiral staircase to our room, seemed like a confirmation that nothing that had happened to this point was a flash-in-the pan. Carole was completely serious not only about being married, but in being married until our end-days on earth. I took great solace in this. I did not respond, but she continued nonetheless as we walked along the upper-level open hallway.

"Tonight it is my suggestion we spend the next few hours sharing. You tell me everything you believe important about your life to this point, and then, if time remains, I will explain how I intend dealing with having you here not only tomorrow night but forever."

"My parents..." I began.

"I have a subplot in mind. Let me listen to your history and then if time remains before beddy-bye I will share. But just in case your monologue

goes beyond my endurance level, we will restart tomorrow. I assume, but am asking - there is no church issue, it being a Sunday?"

"None; I might explain why when we are in our room," which we were, at that point, entering.

Carole immediately stripped totally, disappeared briefly into the bathroom, and returned. "From now on I forget the panties," was her only explanatory comment. I followed suit and both of us noticed that Mister Erect was moving into fullness.

"Alright mister Straight and True," she chided. "Your turn will come in a few hours; go back to sleep!" It was not instant, but after fifteen minutes of jabbering about my life it gradually resumed a dormant posture. Carole glanced every few minutes to check on the deflation progress. She was filing this away for future reference.

At about the twenty-minute mark of my talking, and she listening intently, she asked the first question.

"Were you an oops baby?"

"I doubt it very much. But my younger brother might have been."

"OK - go on. And by the way, our first son, when it happens, will be named Andrew which was my grandfather's middle name; no more Johns thank you!"

I did continue and was explaining how from age 6 until 15, less one skipped year at age 13, Britt and Lee had packed me off to a two-month summer camp at the unlikely town of Cooperstown, New York.

"A boys-only camp?"

"Yes, until I was perhaps 11 or so, when the camp operators opened a companion facility for girls."

"And how did that change the two-month camping season?"

"First we started having Friday night dances - square dances in fact - and the mess hall where we ate three times a day had been enlarged with a foldable dividing curtain between the girls' and boys' sides. And we shared the pebble-stoned beach and various camp tools, such as the small sailing boats, the water skiing and swimming events."

"You had a girlfriend there?"

And your parents

"Each year there was someone whom I fancied for the Friday night dances; they were as a rule blond and probably far brighter than me. I remember two of their names in fact."

"Tell me."

"Polly Parsons who would - I am bragging here - in a few years become Miss New York, and then Wendy something - her first name escapes me. She was from New Jersey and a bit on the rough side, although very attractive. I learned the importance of brushing my teeth before going to the Friday night dances from Wendy."

"Is that a useful story?"

"Not really, but I am now a devotee to brushing properly several times daily."

"I've already noticed that," Carole smiled. "And I have something-Wendy to thank for this?"

"You do."

And so it continued for another twenty minutes.

"Science Fair?" she stopped me in the middle of year 13.

"Yes - they were new in 1951 and my entry in Thompkins County won first prize and a bit like basketball later, I went on to the state finals."

"And??" She asked.

"Oh yes, I won for 8th grade state level; someplace there is a certificate and a Blue Ribbon for..."

"I suggest that along with the basketball award, they come here for safe keeping."

It was trust-me-Carole speaking in advance for our future children and grandchildren. I agreed, of course, not certain how to rescue these from my mother's safe-keeping file system. Just rescuing *me* from 1016 Sunnybrook was still a major concern - to me - even if Carole seemed ready to solve this as well. I simply did not know how she would do it and the clock was running.

Of which her bedside alarm-radio now registered nearly 9PM. I noticed and Carole noticed me noticing. "How far are you from getting here; to Acalanes?" she asked.

"Five, maybe ten minutes."

"Finish and then we'll restart Sunday. I need to know all of this to be prepared to meet Lee and Britt - tomorrow."

"Ah Carole - *you* plan to meet them tomorrow??" was uttered in a quaking voice.

"Of course - you do not for a second believe you are going to be sleeping at 1016 Sunnybrook Sunday night while your fiancée is here in this bed *alone* - do you?"

"Pardon me; I will be back after using the bathroom." I needed some alone time, however brief. Carole, for all she could be, would be - was going to tackle head-on *my* parents and convince them from a zero start point I should come back here to *live with her??*

"I read your concern," she said on my return. "*Trust me* - again - I can do this and especially now that I know about the ten summers you spent away in camp. This could be a lengthy but results-assured discussion. Just plan when we go there tomorrow to slip away while I am finishing with your parents to locate a piece of luggage large enough to pack most of your personal effects and clothing inside. You will return here with me, I promise you, but perhaps we'll share Christmas with them! Yes Bobby, you will be in *this* bed, with your future wife, tomorrow night."

Chapter Ten

Towards the Plan – if not yet ‘Grand’

We were entwined and asleep by 9:45. Mister Erect had discovered a new posture enveloped inside another body as we drifted off to sleep; my front to Carole's back. It would become a lifetime posture in fact and once again, neither of us even twitched before the alarm-radio alerted us at 7AM.

“Wake up my Bobby!” was louder than the radio and less the under-pants the movement of her body created instant stiffness, a reminder of going to sleep.

“Save it, shower time!” was her instruction as she leapt out of bed, disappearing into the bathroom alcove. “Come on - I'm not waiting and this time it is my turn to lather *you* up!” Trust-me was alive and well.

And I did not linger, the initial shyness was now past. We were an engaged couple, if only the two of us knew and appreciated this status. I had fallen asleep mulling over how we should act around one another in public - especially at Acalanes - to avoid stirring up comment or observation. I should have expected Carole would be there before me, at least in mind. She would have instructions over the course of what promised to be a stressful day, facing my parents for a start. It still seemed like a fantasy-dream to me; 48 hours ago I was attending my fourth day at a high school I barely understood, with a group of kids who were foreign in their dress, slang and actions. Even more frightening, only thirty days ago I had been on a bus heading west following one night at a transit hotel in Omaha; my parent's idea of taking a break during the five-day cross-country jaunt to my new home in the Golden State. In fact, my new bedroom on Sunnybrook Drive still felt like a transit hotel, having not been there or in California long enough to accept it as home. And here I was in love, engaged, and

somehow against all odds scheduled to become the lifetime partner of a girl who was not only twice as bright as me but thousands - perhaps millions - of times more capable of paying her own way. Had I died along the cross-country trip and ended up in teen-age heaven?

Carole added a new scheduled event after the lingering shower, which had continued her Saturday schedule; 'Once in the morning in the shower - again at night in bed'. "You towel me off, I will reciprocate," was her suggestion; actually, instruction. I should have suspected this was the launch of another daily routine.

"How do you want your eggs and two or three?" was the next question as she slipped on her panties; a bra was to her nettlesome and it would stay off until later in the day when we would take that feared trip to Sunnybrook Drive. My answer was two and poached, which she promptly delivered to Gracie over the intercom phone. "Oh yes," she interrupted again; "bacon. Yes or no?" I chose not, breakfast to me being more of a burden than a way to start the day. I should have anticipated a plate of freshly sliced fruit and a pitcher of just-squeezed orange juice. I'd best get used to this, I thought to myself, as we sat down in the alcove.

A few minutes into breakfast and Carole Ann Caldecott was ready to move into gear.

"You do realize my last initial will not change once I am Carole Caldecott-Cooper?" she began. "The Junior needs to disappear, but I've already mentioned that."

I did and said so.

"I was prepared, before we met, to change all my monograms; that was a minor but measurable point in your favor. Oh yes - you've passed the tests, my husband-to-be," she smiled with a wink, reaching to my hand for a gentle squeeze.

I turned beet red and that caused her to stop chewing long enough to break out in laughter and then having a mouthful, discharge the yet to digest food into a paper napkin. Life with Carole was very unlikely to ever be *dull*; a thought I had contemplated previously. Fortunately for my still developing mindset, I would hold barely a two-percent grasp of what was heading my way; *not-dull* didn't even dent the subject.

Towards the Plan – if not yet 'Grand'

Swallowing the last of her melon and papaya, chasing it with a half glass of OJ, she began outlining the day. I could chew and listen, which would become yet one more new habit for me.

"From here we go back to French - don't give me a scowl please. The reason for this is that I am going to assure your parents you will achieve at least a B in French, and once I have said that, there will no be excuse if you do not. Again, while you do French, I will retire to John's office to finish housekeeping chores. When that is completed and we go over your recordings together, I have an English composition paper for you to read and make suggestions. I am your French tutor while you are my English lit tutor. And that also will be part of my presentation to Lee and Britt. And this should get us to around 10:30. Questions so far?"

I had one that had been gnawing in my mind. "I assume George will drive us to Sunnybrook. Perhaps I should call and confirm they will be home and if yes, when do you plan us to be there?" It seemed mechanical to me.

"Actually, that was my next mental point. So you call, try to get them to see us between 2 and 3, not later than 4. If we get there too late it will give Lee an incentive to urge you simply stay home tonight, which of course is unacceptable to me. And before you ask, after creating a time frame, we'll sit down and rehearse everything to be said and how we deal with their questions. That will get us to Gracie's lunchtime I expect. Sorry if this bunches up our day, but after we do this, it will never have to be repeated; this is a one-time event."

I nodded in agreement, another habit just now being launched; it would continue for decades.

"OK - last juice swallow and off we go!" And we did; me to the Study, Miss Caldecott-to-become-Cooper to father John's office.

The hour passed in 30 minutes; French seemed less impossible, but I was doing a repeat of the same twelve sentences first tackled Saturday afternoon. "Repetition makes perfect" would become Carole's oft-quoted enjoiner, which she applied broadly like a four-inch wide paint brush; "Yes - even with our physical relations," she would quip. Carole was quickly

becoming my tutor in living *and* life, not merely her firstly proposed French.

"Your English composition - unfortunately we do not have the same class schedule so it took a little doing to get my hands on your first week trial composition - but here it is," holding up two lined sheets of paper held together with a blue paper clip. She saw my astonished look, electing to ignore it for the moment. "The blue clip is important, Bobby; this is the way Miss Francis does her initial separation of papers. In first-week-lit there was only one other blue-clip, a girl named Sheila, and lots of silver and reds. I'd say based upon this first effort, you are destined for a 4.0 here. Are you with me?"

"Shocked beyond belief is my only reaction."

"About the blue-clip?"

"No my dear, that you hold in your hands the actual original paper itself."

"Where there is a will, there is a way. And five dollars helps too."

"Dare I ask for an explanation?"

"Many teachers have a 12th grade assistant; it is part of the Acalanes formula. Those students who seem destined for teaching careers get OJT in their final high school year and the papers and tests when completed are read by both the assistant and teacher; then the assistant places them into the file system. For a fiver this paper simply took a weekend detour; Monday it will go back to the destination file."

"And when did all of this happen?"

"Friday afternoon between 5th and 6th periods. I can usually get what I want at school with a fiver; if not, two together. For most students I am a blur, a shadow that pointedly stays out of all organized school activities and only speaks out in class. Even there I have to ration my participation or petty jealousies would arise. I want people to know I am there, but not to remember me in any specific setting. Can you see why?"

"Not really unless this is about being a tall poppy."

"Interesting phrase, which I take to mean anyone who sticks out more than others in a crowd becomes a target?"

Towards the Plan – if not yet 'Grand'

"Exactly. But why should *you* be concerned about sticking out?"

"Caldecott."

"Excuse me? Your last name? Why should that be a problem?"

"Not a problem but a red flag; actually more like a magnet that attracts unwanted metal filings."

"Excuse me?"

"OK - when you arrived in Oakland on the bus you passed through the tunnel between Orinda and Oakland?"

"Actually, no - the bus came in from the northeast after passing through Sacramento. I only travelled through the tunnel with my family when they met me in the Oakland Greyhound terminal, returning to Sunnybrook Drive. It was a rather thrilling ride in addition to seeing my family again after more than two months; my mother has a brand new yellow Buick convertible and the top was down and ..."

"The tunnel. Do you know its formal name? Actually there are multiple tunnels but - the name?"

"No idea."

"Good - another point for Bobby even after you have won the game! The array is named Caldecott Tunnel," and she reached for a nearby perspiring glass of iced-tea.

"Oh my, of course, now that I have been here and shown around, and you have made it a point to confide in me your personal financial status, perhaps Caldecott takes on a new meaning. So here you go hiding at the back of the crowd, but passing out fivers!"

"And that, my future husband, is the one possible flaw in the way I conduct myself in public; people receiving fivers will remember me, and they will talk. Fortunately for me, and you, that era in my Acalanes life should be over; I've found you, researched you, and that should pretty much end my fiver-of-the-day activities."

We were several feet apart in separate chairs at the table alias desk of the Study. I moved to her. "I think I need a hug from my fiancée," and she quickly stood and obliged. It was a long hug and might have gone further other than Carole's ever-present level of self-control. Separating, she moved

her chair up closer to mine, enough that our fingers could intertwine. "OK - returning to my English lit paper; another fiver got it back to me and here," reaching into a folder, "it is."

The paper clip was silver.

"May I read it please? You also have Miss Francis?"

"Yes, first period and that simplified my getting yours. The 12th grader understood a reason for me to want to see my own and I asked for it first. But in the stack were two with blue clips and I took a chance and asked if I could inspect them; that's how I know someone named Sheila was the other blue. When I then saw your name on the second blue, my heart jumped a beat and the assistant saw as logical my wish to do a comparison with a blue. She asked which one or both, and as I already held yours in my hand, I answered this one will do, thank you. So you see, it was my built-in Caldecott sense of not being a tall poppy that was at work!"

"Why do I suspect there is slightly more to this?"

"Of course my Bobby; there is. Your Ithaca ninth-grade transcript showed solid 'A' in English as well as Social Studies and History - whatever it was they called it there. Oh yes, you apparently took Spanish 1 in ninth grade and the 'D' mark has followed you; that was a pre-sign to me you were going to require tutoring in French; they are the same base-root languages. And so you won't be too surprised, I contacted Boynton Junior High and convinced them I was with The Orinda High School - of which there is no such thing of course. And I asked them to Deskfax me your 7th and 8th grade transcripts. Would you believe they do not have a Deskfax machine! Anyhow, sometime in the next week or two that should show up in my family's Orinda postal box downtown. I'm just building a strong foundation here so we can adjust to anything that comes our way."

"There will be one surprise to you there; 8th grade."

"Tell me."

"My mother - Lee, or Babe as she is called within the family - was my teacher in Social Studies. It was simply luck of the draw and during the entire school year only a few close friends even knew this."

Towards the Plan – if not yet 'Grand'

Carole smiled broadly. "And your transcript will show what grade you earned?"

"A-minus. She refused to even consider a straight A and several others in the class did receive a full A. It is one of those amusing family tales!"

"Fodder for the grist mill my Bobby. I suspect at some point it will come up in conversation between Lee and I. Oh yes - explain the Babe nickname."

"Mother was the last of six children who survived; there was a seventh who did not. And she was the youngest, which caused her to be nick-named Baby. As she grew up, Baby evolved into Babe and as best I can now recall, nobody but members of the family are allowed to call her Babe."

"Thus when she asks me to call her Babe it will be an A+ day in my life?"

"And mine as well!"

Chapter Eleven

When to 'prep' – when not to 'prep'

Carole's English lit paper involved her sentence structure more than vocabulary or content. Twenty minutes with it and she was smiling, rewarding me with a tasty kiss.

"I have it now," hit me after the tasty part. "I've remembered the first name of the summer camp girl from New Jersey - remember Wendy?"

"Last - last name Wendy. It is?"

"This is quite paranormal; Bobbie."

Carole's eyes widened significantly as she focused on mine. "Bobby Wendy? *You* could not remember Bobby??"

"Pretty strange I agree. I also recall it was spelled with 'ie' at the end, not a 'y'."

"So repeating something I offered earlier - I owe your nice-tasting kisses to Bobbie Wendy; correct?"

"We do and indirectly by being more diligent with my brushing, a longer life for my 32 teeth!"

It was now pushing eleven and that phone call to my parents dangled in front of me like a glistening guillotine blade.

"Do it - get it over; all you have to do is confirm when they will be home and include the line 'when the Caldecotts bring me home'. Got it?"

I did.

Rising from the table-desk, Carole opened a small storage door and extracted one of Bell's instruments. "May I stay here while you call?" My preference, for Carole to make the call, seemed unlikely to transpire and a sure sign of my chicken-heart.

"It's just that so much rests on this visit..." I began.

"*There* - your mind is focused; you called it a *visit* and not a coming home trip. See, you have the cortex properly arranged; now just stay with the plan."

My mother answered the call, rather promptly, instantly launching a series of questions arriving as if fired from a machine gun. By "...and have you had enough hamming for awhile?" I was intimidated. Carole could tell simply because Lee had done all of the speaking.

"Mom, all about it when the Caldecotts bring me home. Will you and Dad be there between say 2 and 3?"

"We are not coming for you?"

"No, my classmate here has arranged with - parents - to get me there."

"So we will meet someone named Caldecott?"

"That seems appropriate."

"Should I be prepared to offer something to drink or eat?"

"Save it for a later visit," I responded without thinking far enough ahead. My mother did however.

"So the Caldecotts are likely to become new California friends?" Now I was heading directly into a sink hole and simultaneously as Carole was straining to hear my mother's voice in the earpiece we both shared, her left hand was excitedly moving an index finger back and forth across her throat. Her intent was unmistakeable; 'cut it off - NOW!'

"OK - see you between 2 and 3 - my best to Dad," returning the instrument to its cradle without listening for a final response.

"Whew," mopping my forehead with a damp hand. Carole already had a lady's handkerchief out of her skirt pocket and pressed against first my head and then handing it to me with the obvious instruction to dry the back of my hand.

"Informative," she began, sitting down on my lap and running fingers through my hair. "Your mom is going to be the tough one, but I can handle her. Now, being affirmative, here is where I need you to focus. I'd rather you not ask me why when requesting several items; if not during today's visit, sometime soon. Might there be a day when neither your mother nor father would be at home and I assume your key would let us in?"

When to 'prep' – when not to 'prep'

My mind was trying to reset to a center point. “Probably Thursday; Britt goes to his office in Berkeley every morning around 7:30 - of course it is a very slow commute at that time. But on Thursday when the cleaning lady is there - you already know that - mom usually takes off to do shopping, visit the library and generally be gone from say 9 to 4 or so. But we’d be in school then...?”

“I’ll return to that point. Memorize with me: first, we need something with Britt and Lee’s legal signature on it. Second, we need a copy of your birth certificate and as a backup I’ll arrange a certified copy through my local attorney next week. You did say the hospital at Ticonderoga, New York - yes?”

“Correct and of course you know the date!”

Her hands now wrapped around my neck as she bent forward to re-taste my lips. “Perhaps we should both use the same brand of toothpaste? I certainly am not complaining, but there is just a hint of incompatibility here! Moving on - your school transcripts are in hand or under control. But there are records stored someplace on Sunnybrook covering your family history; for example, Camp Chenango. Surely there are photos of you there over the years?”

I had no idea where Miss Efficiency was taking me, but the trip was certainly an eye-opener. “Yes, hundreds in fact, plus various dark green sweaters with badges sown on; things I earned for being skilled at everything from horseback riding to waterskiing and .22-rifle shooting.”

Laughing softly and re-stroking my black hair, she uttered in a low voice, “I mentioned there was no room in my plan for you to be a jock and I stick to that. But everything you just mentioned only further qualifies you to become my husband. Up the hill, maybe half-way, John Senior constructed a rifle range and someplace around here is a collection of rifles - and pistols - of various calibers. We shall have a morning shoot one day; I’ll have Jorge check the range and clean it up. I last used it with John Senior ... only a few months before he passed. What else is at Sunnybrook we might wish to preserve for our children?”

“May I have a few hours to think about that?”

"Of course - the only item so far I'd really like today, if possible, is a document with both signatures or, two each with one; any thoughts?"

"No - wait a minute! Lee files all of the family account returned checks by the year, some sort of tax requirement. Out in the ham shack and workshop are boxes of these. Suppose I try to slip off to grab a stack of checks? Lee does ninety percent of the check writing, if not more. But if I grab a large enough stack, we should be able to locate one with Britt's signature. Dare I ask why we - you - want their signatures?"

She smiled and placed two fingers against my lips as a seal. "Trust-me; this is a backstop against something not working properly in the future - the future actually being April 20, 1954. And yes, I do realize there is more lurking here I have not yet disclosed."

"Speaking about - I located a reference book in The Library; we were born on a Wednesday and our birthday in 1954 is on a Tuesday. I assume you already know this?"

"Of course I do, Bobby. I've also checked for star alignments and other signs of our future life together. We'll have lots to debate my friend; I am especially interested in selecting the best date for our first born, but before you start to panic, I intend to stay non-productive until at least our 22nd birthday!"

To verify I was paying attention, I tacked on, "and just a passing note; today is September 13th; we are seven months and seven days from our 16th birthday."

Carole rotated her bottom on my lap in a provocative movement, pushed up on the chair arms and stood. "Which brings us to slightly early lunch; I'll tell Gracie ten minutes, OK?"

Lunch done, for more than an hour we crammed, defined as Carole outlining her approach to my parents, injecting the questions or objections she foresaw thrown back at her and rolling smoothly into mind-prepared responses. This was a full non-dress rehearsal to an audience of one before opening night at the theater.

"We do not stand close together, but not too far; maybe a few feet. We don't touch even slightly. We do not stare at one another and smile, because

When to 'prep' – when not to 'prep'

your mother would instantly pick-up the attachment in our eyes. The key here is simply my family has accepted you as the brother that we somehow missed in the sperm-count period. I will dangle the prospect that by having you 'in the Caldecott family' your future will be much better assured than if you live on Sunnybrook and struggle through Acalanes. Once we have their approval, it will be up to you to suggest picking out a few items to take back with us and if there is no objection, disappear and do just that; remembering the pile of checks with their signatures. And, of course, some clothes, although one day soon you and I will go shopping for a wardrobe. The only really difficult part would be if Lee seems intent on discussing this with either Hilda or John before letting you leave. I'm remaining flexible how to deal with that; my plan is to assure her this has their blessing, although neither is available *this* afternoon to be there; nor are either at home right now. That's to end her suggestion she call them. Just to show you how far this aspect has wandered in my mind, I did briefly consider having Gracie answer the phone and pretend she was Hilda! Now, before I change my clothing to create the look I intend for your parents to see, questions?"

"A couple of - well, comments more than questions. My mother calls me Bobby; Britt usually addresses me as either son or less often Bob. He will remain quiet while Lee reacts to your presentation. But at some point he will speak and Lee likely instantly stops talking. She will be emotional, he will be pensive. She will see this as losing a son, he will see it differently, but I cannot forecast what triggers his excellent sense of common good."

"That's very helpful. When I address Lee it will be Bobby; to your dad, Bob. Make sense?"

"Yes."

"So my emphasis should be directed at locating his common sense and focusing on that in the closing arguments?"

"Well said, councillor!"

"Alright - go take a shower - alone. Gracie has washed and ironed your Friday arrival clothes and they are waiting on our bed. I will select appropriate dress and in 30 minutes Jorge will be at the front door with the Woody. It is almost curtain time my husband-to-be!"

Chapter Twelve

"D-Day" at the C house

"Mom, Dad, this is Carole Caldecott, the granddaughter of the ham fellow's station I have been visiting. Carole sits directly behind me in French class and she noticed me carrying a ham radio magazine that led to my visit to their home this weekend."

"Mrs Cooper, father Cooper - I am so pleased to make your acquaintance. My mother, Hilda, and father John would be developing a real shine to your son perhaps because he shares so many of our values and interests. Grandfather Caldecott, we call him John Senior, would also recall his own early interest in electronics, although that would have been in the 20s."

Lee and Britt grasped Carole's outstretched hand and smiled warmly. Carole would speak again before either could respond.

"I have an older sister, Suzanne, married and living in France; there are just the two sibling Caldecotts, but unlike your family, ours are female and yours are male. I suspect Hilda and John regret not having a son."

Lee was now quick off the mark. "Hilda and John; what is it they do?" It was my mother's middle-class query, for in her world anyone in their 40s or 50s had a job or occupation.

Carole was prepared. In fact, her very flowing pleated skirt and carefully selected brown and green blouse hid well her youthful and more than adequate figure. As we had exited the Woody, and without uttering a word, from a skirt pocket she located a very plain set of glasses with a neck chain. She raised the glasses and gently set them on her nose. I tried not to react, but it was difficult, for they made her appear totally meek and mild; think Lois Lane in a decades-later Superman movie.

"John - in our home he is junior because grandfather is Senior - is an investment advisor and like you, Britt, he earned his Civil Engineering degree. Just as an aside, senior grandfather John also earned the same degree a generation earlier, so it runs in the family. Hilda has the luxury of not being employed and spends her time involved in a wide range of charities, including the Board at the San Francisco Opera Company. She, possibly, spends more hours each week doing charitable functions than John does working, so I've never decided which one works the most."

Father was smiling, but standing behind Lee, who reinitiated her quiz time.

"Carole, might we go to our lounge room? I am still adapting to the California lifestyle and back in Ithaca - that's where we previously lived, in case Bobby has not explained - it would be the living room." She led the way through the small front entranceway to the glass-lined lounge, facing into what Jorge would have decided 'are gardens in need of plenty help - soon'.

Mother indicated a floral patterned two-seater for Carole and I, but following previously given instructions, I selected an isolated chair slightly out of the conversation flow that would follow.

"French class?" Lee restarted. "My intuition suggests you are an honors student?"

Carole now smiled, as in her mind she was being led down the exact path she wished to follow. "As a family we have attended and graduated from Stanford, which one of my great uncles helped found. My heritage would possibly get me in there after Acalanes but yes - no report card has ever come home for parental inspection that did not have all A-grades. We call it 4.0 here in California."

"Tell me about Acalanes. Is it a good school?"

Carole would wing it here; a question not anticipated.

"Perhaps adequate; good is difficult to define with society changing so rapidly. In fact, I attended a private girl's school in Berkeley until my freshman year - last - at Acalanes. So to be precise with my answer, the classes are rather too large, the school emphasis is on non-serious as in non-academic

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areas. I should tell you now; Carole Ann Caldecott is not a joiner of clubs. I have no boyfriend and no plans to acquire one. I do have many hobbies and outside interests, but none are connected to Acalanes."

Mother went straight to the kill. "Bobby - boyfriend?"

"Your Bobby? Oh my gracious; yes by definition he is a boy, and he is a friend, but in our relationship I do not marry the two words into a single word. A boy and a friend but not a boyfriend. Rather, my family prefers to think of Bobby as the brother we did not have in our turn at the sperm wheel." It was a 4.0 statement that scored big time with my mother. Carole, as I was rapidly discovering, was a past-master at the English language. In *her* mind, boy and friend had advanced to fiancé on the floor of John Senior's Study. We were *never* boyfriend / girlfriend, even for a second.

Babe smiled broadly, having heard stories of how uninhibited teenage girls in California were and when we climbed out of the car, Carole from the front seat and me from the rear, this had been her first mental reaction; 'my son has already found a girlfriend'!

"Carole, will you please address us as Lee and," indicating my father, "Britt? Maybe there is a two-way street here; Britt and I regretted we did not have a daughter."

Carole laughed rather heartily, enough so the stage glasses slid down her nose and were going further until a thumb pushed them back. I had to turn and stare out the lounge window fearful my face was going to display far too much - any would have been a mistake - emotion. My mother - Lee - had just set up a Hail Mary touchdown pass and all Carole had to now do was race for the goal line.

"Very well; Lee, and Britt, it will be and thank you for that acceptance. About French class?"

Lee indicated by dipping her chin down and back Carole should continue.

"Bobby is not 4.0 and his Spanish class back in Ithaca suggests romance languages and he are not a natural mix. So we have formed a brother and sister pact; I will tutor him in French and while starting from a D in Spanish a 4.0 for the first term may be difficult, you have my assurance he will at

least achieve a 3.0 and by the end of the second term, 4.0. You said two-way street regarding me and daughter. There is only one class subject I find challenging this year; of all things, it is English Literature. Yesterday I sat Bobby down and we concentrated on his abysmal connection to French for an hour; and again today we repeated that exercise. In another week of this I expect he will actually be raising his hand to participate in the French-only classroom discussions. As for me, Bobby's straight-A history in English suggested he could be my advisor in English Lit. So we resumed in the Study and in twenty minutes time he had found and explained where my mistakes were in sentence construction. Why do I suspect he got this skill from you, Lee?"

Mother's response was textbook predictable; for just a fleeting second I thought she might jump from her chair, rushing to hug Carole Ann Caldecott. My fiancée instantly knew half of this battle was won.

The emotional pause was Britt's opportunity to speak. "Babe - that's what we call her within the family - is a much-frustrated junior-high teacher of English and history. Frustrated because we arrived too late in the summer for her to locate a full-time position to practice her skills. I can tell you her concerns are focused on gaining the best possible education for both children and the next step - university - is never far from her mind. But I don't believe Bob spent the weekend with your family so you could tutor him in French. What happened with the amateur radio aspect? In my mind it will be electrical engineering at university and for today being a ham seems like the perfect interim step."

Thank you, Britt, for setting up Carole's extra-point try after the Hail Mary touchdown pass, raced through my mind. I stole a quick glance at my fiancée as she reached for her custom leather purse, which would easily double as an executive brief case; out came a set of photos.

"I do not have a ham license," she began, "nor does my father. But John Senior has held one for - let me see - 30 years. On the back of our property, which runs from the top of the Berkeley or Orinda Hills down into modern day Orinda and Claremont, Senior began assembling a ham station three decades ago. It is in a building he designed and built for this very purpose,

generously enlarged and updated every ten years or so. I have my own study room in the station, behind a door, and often go there for the solitude. Perhaps it will make better sense if I share some photos."

As Carole stood so as to face both Lee and Britt in turn, she began her well-prepared show and tell. "This small Polaroid is of your son in the station at one of the operating positions yesterday." Lee glanced at it, me in the heavy-duty commercial earphones, and Britt took it to study closer. Carole waited 20 seconds as he did so.

"There are twenty-two operating positions - think distinctly separate complete ham stations - in this building," and she produced an aerial photo that might have been two or three years old; I couldn't yet tell. The 8 x 10 inch color image was breathtaking and my mother gasped, while Britt nearly fell out of his chair as Carole slowly repositioned it for his eyes.

Carole continued her monolog. "The original building was begun in the late 20s - the exact date escapes me at this moment - and today, as you will shortly see, it is as awesome inside as it is outside. Now, Britt, and Lee, down here in the bottom left corner you can just make out the roof outline of our home - or Hacienda as Californians call such places."

Lee was suddenly realizing that Carole Ann Caldecott was more than simply bright; she belonged to a family which - well - the Coopers did not. Britt would speak first.

"Carole - when we lived in Ithaca I held a pilot's license and used to fly to Ohio once a month. Close to my destination I passed over a Voice of America facility I believe they called Bethany; this immediately reminds me of how massive that looked from the air. You are saying this is your grandfather's *amateur* radio station?"

"The interior walls have many dozens of photographs and VOA in Bethany, Ohio is on one wall. Yes, this is what my grandfather built, but may I explain who uses it?"

"It does seem rather large for *one* ham..." Britt said, with the last words several decibels lower in level.

"Next images;" and the love of my lifetime produced a pair of additional 8 x 10 colored images. "I noted there are 22 separate operating positions

and the small Polaroid of your son was in fact taken with him sitting at a now museum-grade station system John Senior used back in 1938; I suspect you remember that year! Here in this photo pair is what the place looks like on a typical Friday night to Sunday night; more than a dozen hams all here, all operating individual sets of equipment. John Senior's vision included providing a community ham radio station - not exactly a club, but more like a gathering place for special people who also just happen to be licensed hams. Are you with me so far?"

Britt shook his head in the affirmative while Lee was still holding the first color enlargement, studying the growth camouflaged roof outline of the Caldecott home, well down the hillside. I guessed she was attempting to work out just how *big* the Hacienda really was.

"In FCC language, W6HD is an Amateur Radio Club Station, but in actual fact it is not merely by-invitation-only. The enrollment is limited to 50 and about the only way you become a member is to do something spectacular in electronics or communications. For example, both Hewlett and his partner Packard are members. Another example - both Eitel and McCullough are members. I do not wish to sound snobbish, but members here are the *Who's Who* of electronics, not just from California, but nationwide."

"Bob sat there - on a Saturday - with people like that?"

"He did; being the apprentice for Caldecott surrogate son probably helps."

Britt now did something I, at least, did not anticipate. He rose and paced a few steps - he was not a pacing man.

"Carole, I have an impulse here, which may result in Babe leaping straight out of her chair. But nothing ventured - here goes. Bob spent one weekend there; I am guessing he can return for more weekends?"

"Yes of course!" Carole smiled, removing the actor's glasses now, allowing them to land on her well-disguised chest line.

"Babe, our son has spent two months each year for something like ten away from us. Camp Chenango was good for him at the time; what is occurring to me is *Camp Caldecott* might be an even better place for him

now. Carole, suppose between your tutorship of his school and the proximity of John Senior's Voice of California ham radio station, Bob spent more than weekends with your family. I have never been this bold before with a thought, but the facts are so self-evident..."

Dad was right; Babe came straight out of her chair and immediately launched into a "Please pardon Britt..." tirade. "He is way out of position here, to ask that you allow Bobby to *live* with you..."

Carole literally stepped between them using hand motions urging both to sit back down. Then she stood to the perimeter with her back towards my off-side chair and gave the proposal of her life; well, perhaps the *second* if we consider her invitation to be married to me as first.

"Lee, Britt - you have no way to know this in advance, but my family has already come to Britt's suggested conclusion. Here in my case," and she reached into it extracting two sheets of paper, "are two notes. Hilda could not be here today - that Opera Board thing, and John Junior is someplace in his DC-3 as we speak. The first is a note signed Hilda which says, 'Ask the Coopers if Bobby can be here fulltime so you can tutor him and he can profit from the proximity to Senior's electronics.' You will note the date is today. And in the second note, signed John which would be John Senior, a similar message. You may inspect them of course, but they go back with me to the Hacienda; it is a Caldecott thing about our privacy."

Lee read both twice before passing them, through standing Carole, to Britt. He in turn handed them back to Carole where they were safely tucked into the attractive brown leather case.

Neither said a word for perhaps 30 seconds and that provoked me to stand, behind Carole, and say something. "Yes, I knew about this in advance; and yes, this is what I want to do. You are not losing a son, you are securing a daughter." And I sat back down again. Carole never moved a muscle my parents could detect, but there was just a wiggle of her back side I detected through the facing-me rear of her pleated skirt. We both knew the extra-try had been a two-pointer.

In the final thirty minutes, as I was gathering essentials into a large canvas bag, Lee had decided Carole should call her Babe, after debating

the mind-question of whether *mom* might be even more appropriate. And yes, I managed to slip into the workshop to locate a bundle of tax-record cancelled checks.

Carole also learned I was born at 1:30AM April 20, 1938, allowing her to calculate for my parents "including for daylight time and time zones, Bobby is 9 hours my senior so he is my *big* brother". I would always feel, upon hearing the story repeated over the decades, that *big* had a secret meaning known only to Carole and I. Britt had secured an invitation to visit the Caldecott facility with cameras to study the hillside tramway built by Senior which Carole had explained during my absence, while Babe asked about Thanksgiving and Christmas plans. Carole remained positive but noncommittal for both and I would learn why later. It was, as I was returning with the larger than life duffle bag stuffed full, and Babe began running through a verbal check list of what I had chosen to go with us, when Carole interrupted for the final time.

"Britt, when you go through the tunnel twice a day, do you ever glance at the road signs as you enter?"

He could not recall anything special. "Look harder tomorrow morning," she suggested.

"Why?" asked my father.

"The tunnels are called 'The Caldecott Tunnel' although in fact presently there are two, with two more planned. The land on our side was donated to the project by my grandfather, while the west side land was provided by his brother Thomas. At one point, Caldecotts owned essentially the full ridge separating the East Bay from this valley, which may help explain why we are very low-key and protective of our privacy. So I ask both you, and Babe, to respect as privileged the information you have learned here today. The Caldecotts do not gossip and I trust you will not as well. As a final thought, when people who know Bobby or about him ponder where he is, simply say 'at a boarding school' and leave it at that. Is that a fair request?"

Mother quickly moved to hug Carole first, I second and Britt took the opportunity to hug a girl only steps away from becoming his daughter-in-

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law. Then it was my time. Mother had tears, dad simply said as he shook my hand, "Don't disappoint us son; but most of all, don't disappoint the Caldecotts."

And with that we were back into the nearly-new 1948 Ford Woody, me in the rear seat, Carole adjacent to Jorge. We were barely out of the driveway of 1016 Sunnybrook when Carole spoke to Jorge. "When we reach the highway, stop and I will return to the back seat."

Chapter Thirteen

48 hours and counting

Which she did, speaking not a syllable. With a smile as wide as her facial muscles would allow, she moved her hips into mine and as George pulled onto Highway 24 Carole raised the pleated skirt, grasping my left hand placing it between her legs, and pushing until it ran into *something*. Then she pulled the skirt down again.

"No panties?" I puzzled.

"A girl has to be prepared," was her low key response. Not another word was spoken during the 15-minute drive back to terminate in front of the oversized garage. George, out of habit, rushed to get out of the car to open a door for Miss Carole and she whipped my hand back onto my lap before the door burst open.

"Thank you George; I will need you tomorrow afternoon and we'll talk about it at dinner."

"Yes, Miss Carole."

Dry hand in moist hand we headed, silently, for a side door.

Inside the Hacienda, still silent, Carole led us up the two spiral staircases and towards our bedroom. "I will tell Gracie we won't eat until after 7," she began unhooking the wide brown leather belt that held her scholarly-image multi-fold Scottish plaid skirt in place. Bending, naked waist down to retrieve it from the floor, she inspected one side closely.

"Off to the dry cleaner tomorrow," was her comment.

"You sat on something at my parents?"

Holding a section in front of my nose provoked a question: "Notice something?"

Look closer; touch it."

"Wet?"

"Remember where your hand rested during our return trip? We girls do that; *leak* when we become energized. Last one in the shower has to select our clothing for school tomorrow!"

Girls, *leaking*, would be a new nail in my stupidity coffin; I had never heard this before, certainly Babe had never mentioned it!

To this point, as we were exiting the shower and doing the new-to-me I-towel-you, you-towel-me exercise that was destined to become a long-term habit, neither of us had mentioned the visit to my parents. It was simply blocked from conversation.

Carole headed for her side of the gigantic bed, rolled back the covers and hopped in; I stood there uncertain what to do.

"Get in silly bones. I suggest we both actually try to nap; later we can explore more pleasurable activity." I did as she suggested and in fact after assuming my-front to her-back position, and cupping my right hand over her upper-most breast we both fell asleep rather quickly. It would be approaching 7PM when she stirred, thereby alerting me.

"I'll tell Gracie we will be down shortly. Lamb chops tonight on a bed of Mexican rice."

I managed to slip on enough clothing to be presentable at dinner; my large duffle bag dragged up two spiral staircases remained to be unpacked and as long as Gracie continued replacing yesterday's clothing with freshly washed and ironed items, it might be some time.

Carole remained quiet and so did I until we were hand-in-hand heading down the top staircase. "That went well, even better than well," she launched. I did not need to ask *what* went well; it was obvious. I murmured "the letters did it" and she chuckled. "They only occurred to me last night. Gracie hand printed the John version, I typed the Hilda letter. And before you even think to ask, I can duplicate *all* of the required signatures so well that no handwriting expert would ever question their authenticity."

"Reconstructing that part when you handed the letters to Babe and Britt, I can't say you ever actually *said* either was, in fact, *genuine*. They read them and supposition took over. You know - you are a world class

supposition-creator. I'm glad we will be married soon; I'd dislike having to be on the receiving end of one of your deceptions!"

"Mystery novels are your root answer. Agatha Christie when I was a youngster but more sophisticated now. Those who write mystery novels, and science fiction, can be the best at this of anyone. I am a fast assimilator."

Entering the dining alcove there was the steaming hot meal awaiting us. I had to wonder what my parents might be eating tonight, but the thought quickly passed. "Give me a sketch of Monday," I suggested launching her. She smiled, reached to squeeze my hand, and dug in. Carole would eat before moving on to my question. I knew there was school, and at some point, whether Monday or not, the ankle x-ray. It was at this reflection I recalled she had not even broached the subject of the improperly healed ankle break to my parents. That would be my first question when she had eaten enough to shift into a talk mode.

"Alright - that satisfies my instant hunger. Do I detect a lurking question before I answer your last one?"

"You do. The ankle, which I'm certain you will address. It never came up with Britt and Babe. I think I may understand why, but an explanation of your strategy would help me better deal with the subject."

"I had your father actually being the one to suggest you move in here and that was a game decider. But Babe, as I am now allowed to address her, was still clinging to *her Bobby*. There was a point towards the end where I might have announced, 'Oh by the way - they are probably going to re-break your son's ankle and redo it properly', and had I done that - she would have you in your Sunnybrook bed so fast I'd probably need a pass to visit. It was my sense of don't mess around with a mom's protective shield and do not even bring it up. By the time they know about it, your ankle is likely to be in plaster and Scotty will be in charge. Is that adequate?"

"Carole Ann Caldecott Cooper, I love you so much that tears form when I say these words!"

She responded by placing a small piece of lamb chop with rice into her mouth and smiling. "Finish your dinner and then we'll talk." Five minutes

of silent chewing followed; I could watch the clock's progression through the alcove, as it hung in Gracie's kitchen.

"Now my Bobby, tomorrow," she began. "School first. The bus begins the Acalanes trip here and goes back down the hill through Orinda and so on. And there will be some who notice you and I are on the bus, that on Friday we were on when they got off. Therefore at least Monday we sit in separate seats and there we will be when kids get on at the next stop. With me?"

"I am, reluctantly".

"It gets tougher. At school we divide and do not rejoin until French in period three. I don't say anything to you, you don't to me. We do not exchange notes or meaningful looks. I will be normal me and until you have gained French-traction, you continue to be your normal quiet self. Still with me?"

"I am."

"Lunch; we have been identified as eating together and there will be liverwurst sandwiches in my purse. You might go to the line for two containers of orange juice and that table for two will have me fending off the hormone-ravaged wolves. Still in agreement?"

"I am."

"Now, while school does not dismiss until 3:20, at 2:50 while you are in homeroom, walk to the desk and tell the monitor you have a doctor's appointment at Kaiser and ask to be excused early. It will essentially be automatic. Then head for the east door adjacent to the volleyball court and if I am not there, George will be with the Woody. I will join you and we are off to Kaiser Permanente in Walnut Creek for a 3:30 x-ray appointment. I have Scotty's instructions, which he has already deskfaxed to them, in case there is a paperwork snafu. I also have several Kaiser Membership cards and for this visit you will be John Caldecott at least for the front admittance staff. Once we are approved to x-ray your real name will become OK; we simply have to get by the Gestapo that controls the front gate. Understood?"

I had been sipping on Gracie's iced-tea as she explained the Monday plan. "Yes, totally understood," was the most creative sentence I could con-

struct. Carole responded by leaning forward, gently squeezing my hand, and uttering words which would stay buried within me: "You follow me, I will follow you, but at the end of the day, we arrive side-by-side." I immediately assumed this had some relevance to our bedtime activities, but ten years hence would still not be certain.

So my response. "I have signed on for the full trip; from now to the end of life - let's say plus one day just to be safe. I will always do my best but at the end of each day, my best will depend upon you more than me. Does that make sense?"

Now Carole stood and with no attempt to hide her feelings pulled my chair back from the alcove table and sat on my lap. "According to Babe, you are older than me by nine hours. I will always respect that, trust-me."

Indeed I would always *trust* Carole; forever plus one day.

Back in our room, after George was instructed what to do Monday, when and where, Carole elected to deal further with Monday. The liverwurst sandwiches, a self-project each morning, would be prepared just moments before we headed to our front gate and the school bus.

She was emptying my duffle bag, trying to decide what to keep or simply toss out. "I believe Wednesday we'll have George take us into Berkeley to do some apparel shopping for you," she began. "You could use new Jockey shorts, socks, a pair of shoes or two, school pants and these shirts reek; Gracie will attempt to re-clean them tomorrow, but frankly my dear, the best plan may be to start over with new. And I believe you have either grown an inch or these pants have shrunk since they were purchased. I trust your penis will not keep growing as you hit your growth spurt; I like it just fine the size it is!"

At 6 foot 1 inch, in fact, there would be one final inch of growth, most of it occurring after April 20, 1954 and by then whether my penis also grew or not would cease being an issue.

"Now, when we finally arrive home tomorrow, it may be pushing 5 because Kaiser is not famous for staying-on-schedule. In theory, the x-rays should not take more than twenty minutes, if that long. But Scotty warns we may not actually get to the machinery until 4:30. So be prepared for

a late return home. It has been my habit, less last Friday, to immediately head for the shower after arriving home from school. I detest being around groups of people and tomorrow we will be faced with not only scummy kids at Acalanes but also the germs that float all over Kaiser. The first thing we will do is immediately head for a hot shower, plenty of scrubbing. This is not a conjugal exercise; this is simply to flush down the drain those foreign attachments we have been exposed to during the day. Any problem with that?"

Only a fool would disagree with her plan; I did not.

"Good; now, because of our late home time, we'll skip both French and English Lit self-reviewing tomorrow. The first day of the week is usually a replay of the past week anyhow for both classes. But you and I at some point, soon, need to do our algebra material together. I'm more or less comfortable with this class and your past has been a B grade; if we combine our knowledge and skills, perhaps your grade point can be pushed up to 4.0. Remember, please, I made certain promises to Babe and Britt!"

"I remember and will not forget," a simple answer to a complex question. How could the very same human mind switch from stroking my naked body to instruction for algebra in just seconds elapsed time? It was a question I would *never* answer.

"Anything else before we call it a night?"

"My body awaits your body," which I thought at the time to be a quite creative answer, still mind-dead that she had actually convinced my parents I should be here. Little did they suspect ...

"Turn off the light and move in, Bobby," was the last sentence spoken.

Chapter Fourteen

My name is John Caldecott and I am here for x-rays

The Gestapo of Kaiser had me staring blankly after they questioned, "Why do our records show you are 50 when obviously you are not?" I had presented John Junior's membership card. Carole to the rescue.

"Excuse me," she began with her tone of authority: "I am Carole Ann Caldecott and this is my brother. I may have grabbed our father's card - both are named John you see. Here is my card. Brother John has x-rays scheduled and if you don't mind, just tell us where to go for that."

The desk lady was clearly not prepared to argue with or take-on Carole. "Suite 201, second floor; use the elevator to your left," was the response. I thought her wise beyond possible 20 years for not entering a debating contest with Carole.

We did indeed arrive early by 15 minutes and would wait 45 more before a nurse called my name; "Bobby Cooper?" Carole was first on her feet, clearly intending to be with me. The x-rays were rather quick, and we were away by 4:15 locating George, ever patient, waiting in the Woody. Walnut Creek to Orinda might require 20 minutes but traffic was heavy and my wife-to-be and I sat silently in the rear seat as George did his best to return us to the top of El Toyonal Road, home. It would be edging onto 5PM when we arrived.

"Gracias, Jorge," Carolë announced, grabbing my hand to exit before the classic-to-be vehicle would be parked away for another day. "You know," she started as we headed into the now familiar side entrance, "John Senior would have liked that we are using his last car for our travels. And, instantly approve of you; I could feel that aura when you first arrived. It is a good shroud and now here we are, engaged, and busy with life. Later this week we

shall talk about life; my ideas on what is ahead for us may differ from your own and best we get it all out and discussed in case you disagree with me."

"I find it very difficult to accept possible disagreement," I began, and paused. A pause with Carole was an open invitation for her to quickly restart and this was no exception.

"Perhaps, but let me field this statement." We were heading upstairs on circular stair number-one; she in the lead, but holding tightly to my hand as was her custom. "Just to let soak in and think about; please don't even attempt to respond now."

"Go ahead."

"Think about why we are in tenth-grade at Acalanes, why after grade twelve we head off, together, to some university and after 4 or 5 or 6 more years we finally enter the world as educated people. And now pose this question: at that magic point in our lives - have we done all of this time because we need it to earn a respectable living? There, that's it for now."

"A quick response?"

"At your own peril."

"Three more years of high school, including our present year, and then a minimum of 4 and more likely say 6 in university; that is in the longest case 9 years. We will both be 24 by then. Is that the thought you want me to consider?"

"Yes Bobby - that is it and that is *all* for now." We were entering the bedroom where an intense hot water shower would follow.

Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday unrolled with what was rapidly becoming a routine. Not for a instant did I ever believe anyone but Carole was in charge. Under other circumstances this might have been a challenge to my male genes, but my rewards were so frequent and sincere any doubts I might have formed quickly dissipated. We did, in fact, spend Wednesday afternoon, leaving school at 2PM with a pass Carole created at home, in Berkeley arriving back after 6 at El Toyonal with George insisting he would carry seven sizeable bags and a box from the Woody to Carole's room. Less two new bras and four sets of pink panties, the contents were all new clothing for Bobby. What I did not expect was a comment over

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late dinner from Gracie; actually more of a question. "Miss Carole, may I dispose of Bobby's worn-out clothing, please?" This had provoked laughter first from my bride-to-be and then I joined in, certain that was how I should be reacting. Carole had the answer once again, as always.

"No Gracie, wash and iron and store in the guest bedroom adjacent to my - our - own. I will take it from there." If that seemed a clouded instruction to me over my chipped beef on toast, Carole quickly explained as Gracie retreated to the kitchen alcove.

"While the odds are slim - even 1 in 50 is too great for me - we will set up your old clothing and a few utensils in the adjacent bedroom. Why? I can see it in your eyes! At some point your father or Babe will drop in here and may want to inspect your bedroom. Better to have it look like it is in use than to explain around the request. Got it?"

I got it; perhaps all I had to do was awaken in the morning and follow instructions for that day? Carole's advance planning was obviously layers deep and in fact, as I occasionally reflected, she still had not explained *why* April 20th, 1954 had been selected for our wedding or what the rush was all about. This mystery continued. No, there were no cold feet for me, but not knowing the intermediate chapter in my near-life was often quite confusing.

"One more question, please?"

"Sir Bobby - proceed!" with a devilish twinkle in both eyes.

"About what you bought today..." and I had paused too long.

"The nursing bra?"

"Yes; when you asked me to see if I could unhook the front clips with the saleslady looking on I felt very uncomfortable. So - a nursing bra?"

Carole's laughter spoke volumes; so much so that Gracie appeared at the alcove edge to be certain "everything OK"? Carole waved her away while still fighting for oxygen.

"And you are concerned the time-table for Andrew may have been stepped up?" with the now classic eye twinkle.

"Well, I don't know why I am asking; you always know the correct answer, but I have to tell you, unhooking and re-hooking the front-clips as a test was very embarrassing to me."

She reached for my hand, bent down and kissed it rather heartily. "The answer is us, my love. This is an experiment; sometimes when we are alone, if I unbutton my blouse and you could by unhooking one or both clips gain access to my tender points - well, it would be faster and better than my having to shed the blouse and remove the full bra."

Now it was my turn to create an out of control laugh. Soon we were both teary-eyed and hugging with abandon. That's right; life with Carole Ann Caldecott Cooper was not going to be dull!

Saturday morning and Doctor Scott. His face was not smiley as we sat down in respective assigned chairs. After small talk he began the oratory.

"Bobby, Carole, this is not good news. The break was not only improperly set, but there remains a hairline fracture which never has or will be close enough to properly grow back into a contiguous bone. Before you draw incorrect conclusions, all of this can be corrected, largely right here in my exam room. But - and Carole this is for you - the mending time will be longer than the typical six weeks. Three months would not be unexpected. Yes, that takes us from say 1 October to 1 January. Questions?"

Carole moved her chair a foot closer to mine, squeezing my hand tenderly. Scotty smiled at the connection and laughed heartily after she spoke. "Your decision about Bobby being able to take showers still stands?"

After perhaps ten seconds he realigned with the room. "Yes; no change in that rule, but we'll need to keep water from lingering between the leg and inner shell of the cast. And, there will be new appliances involved."

"And??" she asked with concern.

"For at least a month, perhaps six weeks, he will require crutches - you know the one under each armpit variety. Then when the hairline is congealing, we'll change the cast and install one that can take the strain for the final healing period. Unless you two dance differently than I did in the 30s, he won't be jitterbugging before 1954!"

Carole's mind was way ahead of me, but I wouldn't learn this until we departed Scotty. On the way back to George and the car she would reveal her thoughts. "We need to rethink how we try to act uninvolved and apart. Just getting you to school and back, with crutches, and around class to

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class, is going to require more of my involvement. So over the weekend we'll create a plan and a reason why I seem to have become your nurse or caregiver. And then, of course, there will be Babe and Britt to consider. I'm not certain their first knowledge of this should be when you crutch-hobble out of the Woody at 1016 Sunnybrook, Bobby!"

"And there are other issues which I suspect you have placed in descending order."

"Such as?"

"Two consecutive spiral staircases, and just for grins how my right ankle at double the normal bulk and weight is going to work when I try to snuggle up to your backside in bed!"

We were at the car and George waiting with an open door.

"And here's another one; you will need to get in on the right-rear side so your oversized leg is towards the door - perhaps the front seat in fact. Wait a minute - that could be a partial answer!"

"To what?" I queried, sliding in with no special effort; something to be missed for perhaps three months.

"Going to Acalanes and back; forget the damned bus; George can take and return us home and this eliminates the school bus rumor mill."

At day nine of our extending relationship, this was the very first time I could recall Carole ever using the *damn* word. A sailor she was not, and quite correctly, it would turn out; her family was always very purist in their speech. I should have expected nothing less.

Holding my hand for the short drive up the hill, one could almost detect her brain cells dancing at jitterbug speed. As Jorge braked the Woody, an electronic signal opening the storage stall door, Carole's eyes suddenly flashed and she quite literally dragged me out of the door, not waiting for it to be opened for her. At a rapid pace, her hand cemented to mine trailing behind, we headed straight for the bottom of the first spiral staircase.

"Listen up here, Mister Cooper. Here is the plan," placing her hand on the staircase rail. "Both stair sets fortunately are double wide; Grandfather designed them to allow moving large items up and down. One of the Ham Club members has a son in Oakland who creates everything from elevators

to moving sidewalks and decorative stairways. I will arrange for them to modify these with a chairlift that rides the railing; a junior version of Senior's tramway. That solves getting you up and down while your leg and ankle are in plaster. And moving on," which she did, heading for the Study alcove, with me attempting to match her brisk pace.

"School?"

Carole was sitting down in her chair and a finger indicated I should join her in a second; soon to be mine. "I am still weighing this one. Going to school on the bus is out. Having Jorge take us to and from is an option but upon reconsideration, that still leaves us dealing with moving you from place to place six classes a day. Because our class subjects are identical save for your chemistry and my biology, it might be possible for you, or me, to shift our schedules so at least five each day mesh; putting us together for all but one subject. That could work, but then I considered *Caldecott privacy*. There is no way on earth you and I would escape attention and before we could say *affair*, half the school would be gossiping. And that brings me to something more radical, but potentially a stepping stone to where I wish us to end up anyhow. Ready?"

It may have sounded like a polite question; rather it was more like a starter's pistol for a track-meet event. I nodded affirmation and my fiancée was away.

"This will basically take us from the leg rework to Christmas holidays; 90 days of one school term. In my mind is a list of which of our classes has a 12th grade OJT assistant; my biology does not, likely your chemistry also does not. The remainder do. So individually, without involving the other, you arrange for a three-month sabbatical leave from chemistry and I for biology. We will shift from in-school to correspondence students; still take the classes doing the same assignments as those at Acalanes, but with their agreement, postpone any actual science lab science sessions until after the New Year; as long as we do the work papers and written tests, that should be acceptable."

She paused to inhale briskly.

"Oh yes, we'll offer your chem and my bio teacher a financial reward for dedicating a Saturday or two to our private lab sessions, after we return

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to regular school. Teachers are always underpaid and dissecting frogs in the company of 25 squeamish girls and boys with raging hormones was never attractive to me anyhow!

"Now back to the OJ1 assistants. I'll offer each one suitable outside pay to, with the teacher's permission, come here once a week after school - not on weekends please! - and spend time with us as substitute instructors. There are five shared subjects; English Lit, Algebra, History, Social Studies and, of course, French. And that reduces to five people the number who will have any idea about our circumstances. I'd like to make that zero rather than five, but feel optimistic at this moment, with Jorge providing transport from school to here, and back to wherever they live, and they are well paid, my initial ground rules to each will be accepted. Question?"

I noticed it was question-singular and not questions plural.

"One?"

"One for now - I am not finished yet."

"Alright - assure me all of this activity, and yes cost, is justified by my having an improperly healed broken ankle."

Carole smiled widely, grasped both of my hands, pressing them to her cheeks for perhaps thirty seconds; her eyes were shut. "My husband-to-be. There is nothing - restating the key word as *not anything* - which falls outside my area of correction if in fact there are solutions just waiting to be tapped. May I get back on track?"

Softly kissing the back of each hand and returning them to the desk we occupied, I nodded in affirmative.

"I did not anticipate this extra complication - the crutches I mean. A straight leg plus ankle cast was manageable; crutches change the level of the game. To re-answer your statement, perhaps not precisely by definition a question, I have a serious question in *my* mind about spending the next seven to nine years attending some sort of school. But that will wait another time; the ankle will not. Scotty urges this be done sooner rather than later and if we wait too long, any difficulties with the rework healing well ahead of 20 April might be stressful. The railings completion with

the moving seat will establish a date for Scotty to do his magic. So - inside that drawer by your right knee is a red leather book. May I have it please?"

Silently she perused the front page listings, selected a name, reaching into the door-front cupboard for a telephone. For the next ten minutes this not-yet 16-year-old would request, coerce, and finally outsmart the male voice in her earpiece concerning "how fast can you accomplish this"? She was smiling as the instrument fell back onto the cradle, gingerly lifted back into its hole and the cupboard door shut.

"Stand up Bobby," she began, already extending her bent knees. "This will work; we can do this; he will be here Monday at four to survey, take measurements, and begin the fabrication. He spoke of a month to completion; I finally got him down to ten days, at a premium price of course. So - today is 19 September; assuming they begin after fabrication on the 30th, ten working days moves us to Tuesday October 13th. Scotty can re-build your ankle on the 14th and I will alert him to that tentative date. We have three full school weeks to create the rest of the arrangements but Tuesday the 13th just might end up being the last day we *ever* attend real school."

"At least this year," was my response.

"Yes - well, a subject for another day. Now, Gracie and lunch?"

Chapter Fifteen

This 'period' is not a school class hour

The elaborate and artfully arranged double platters of cold cuts, for me, and a half dozen fresh fruit varieties, were consumed mostly in silence. Gracie poked her head in twice, possibly because she was now accustomed to discussion and laughter during the meals; both lacking today. The second time she lingered in view long enough for Carole to smile broadly and compliment her dearest and closest female companion in life. And this provoked Gracie to begin the hand-twisting routine Carole expedited by the simple use of a waving hand.

Each of us approaching a full tank, wife-to-be gently moved her chair back a few inches to begin a discussion I neither anticipated nor was prepared to sit through. However, I would and at the end, as always, my education would be improved several notches.

"Are you done eating?" she began. The prudent answer would be yes.

"Tell me what education you have concerning a woman's reproductive cycle." Her eyes focussed directly aligned with my own; even a flinch would have been in error. So I gulped, snuck a short swallow of iced-tea, trying to act nonplussed. She accepted the delayed answer, aware the question content was flying in from outer space with no pre-warning.

"Basically none; just what one picks up on the street while developing as a teenager," I answered.

"Thought so. OK - reproduction 101 follows." And it did, non-stop for ten minutes. Carole launched with the male sperm and female egg sequence, ran through the various female body parts required to create a baby, and came down to the core of this particular lecture.

"Menstruation," she began. "Or as it is colloquially called, a period or rag time and perhaps a dozen more unacceptable to me slang terms. This is an absolutely normal, monthly occurrence; you do understand that?"

I did.

"Mine will begin tomorrow or Monday. There will be an effect on our conjugal times, and it is my custom to experience something known as cramps; they are not pleasant and before Bobby entered my life I would have retired to my room or the Library with a hot water bottle or heating pad for at least a few hours. You need to understand this and fully appreciate I am not angry or unhappy with you when this happens. It is simply one technique for me to get through this each month, which in fact occurs thirteen times a year, because the cycle repeats every 28 days. Question?"

"Two?"

"This time," she responded with her famous eye twinkle.

"What can I do, if anything, to help you with this period?"

"I take *period* to be a length of time, not the actual event so-named. The answer is I don't know, but if I have unusual hours of silence - almost guaranteed - or develop sudden urges for Chinese food - most unlikely - just go with the flow. Oh my goodness - that was not intended as a pun. I am *so* sorry to have said that."

In fact, it would be a reflective hour later in the day before the pun even registered with me; being 15 and uneducated in this subject was as telling as painful.

"And two. The absence of conjugal relations is understood of course; possibly as much for my delicate mind as your temporary body condition. But sleeping together?"

"If you mean in the same bed in the form we have adopted, other than mister straight arrow finding a night-time nest, I will actually have greater need for your closeness during this period - there I go again - more than at other times. So, no real changes beyond the conjugal act."

"Is that it?"

"Oh my, no, but that is, well, the gory bit. I have mentioned my plan to wait until we are 22 before creating Andrew; child one. I now amend

This 'period' is not a school class hour

that to include number two, Anita, when we are 24. Women only become pregnant, as we have discussed, when there is one or more eggs in my ovary container. Scotty has trained me to recognize when, during my monthly cycle, such eggs are likely to be present and by measurement in my case this occurs between days 14 and 16 - that's starting from my initial menstruation day. So if that begins tomorrow, being day one, 14 days later or October 10th, we have a high-alert in progress. Just one of your apparently abundant spermatozoon gaining penetration to an egg and we have a new life forming. So there is, in addition to my menstruation or period each month, another few days when conjugal is forbidden. There are daily self-tests I do to determine when, as they say in the trade, *I am fertile*. I'll show you by demonstration during the October cycle. The bottom line here is two or three days each month when you do not unload into me and the sum of this plus the other will on average add to approximately one week. Are you having second thoughts about becoming involved with me?"

Only one response would have been proper and fortunately I elected it by rising from the chair, taking the half-step to Carole's and throwing my arms about her shoulders while burying my face in raven hair. "I love you - and will, forever and a day." The backwards embrace lasted for several minutes; no words were necessary. Or so I thought.

"That leaves us with this afternoon. Now you have heard my tale of a woman's plight in life, here is my suggestion; make that suggestions plural. First, we head to our room for the much discussed, but so far never-occurring nap time. This is in recognition tomorrow may be a no-no day. After the preliminaries and perhaps a real nap, followed by a shower, my Bobby and I head for the Study for week two of French. Twelve new statements, the twin Webcors and so on. And yes, I will disappear down the hallway to oversee some family corporate business. Remind me sometime to explain what else Senior left in my name alone. There is a radio station licensed to Oakland for example." She paused for a reaction.

"You - *you!* - own a radio station?"

"Actually two; a second in Fresno of all places as well. Another subject, please."

"All hams dream of owning a radio station; a professional, commercial radio station and"

"No more dreams on that issue. On April 20th you graduate from fiancé to owning half of everything I do; *understand?*"

In fact, I did *not* understand. Being married on my sixteenth birthday seemed like a rather stupendous move for one day. But owning "*half of everything I do*" was so far beyond even boyhood fantasies this fell on largely non-registering ears; or brain cells, if in fact any were still functioning.

"OK - overloaded; I can see it written all over your face. But I hope you like Rhythm and Blues radio because that is what we program on both. Off to nappy time?"

If someone, anyone including Carole, could have tapped into my mind to say 'Rhythm and Blues will shortly be followed by Rock and Roll and both stations would adopt that music heading towards number one in their markets' - well, it would not have registered with me anyhow. And on September 19, 1953, as far as I knew, nobody had even created the phrase 'Rock and Roll'. I would be wrong on that issue. But it would explode into our connected lives shortly.

Taking my hand, we trooped silently up both spirals, me now conscious within three weeks or so I would be riding on some sort of stairway-tram rather than walking. And into our bedroom where Carole proceeded to pull back all but the bottom sheet and then stripped in record time except for the bra.

"Here - experiment. You recognize this one; show me you can get through the front gate."

It was far easier in our bedroom versus standing inside a semi-private try-on booth with a saleslady recording the event in her mind. I thought I did it well.

"Now, re-hook it and do it again - with your mouth!"

"Excuse me??"

"Use your lips, your teeth; see if you can release the clasp without your fingers!"

This 'period' is not a school class hour

The immediate result was Mister Straight Arrow was now half full-size suffering from too-much too-fast. But there was ultimate success and then Carole reached over her shoulders to disconnect from the nursing bra, tossing it onto the Gracie please-wash-me chair. It would be following our nap and shower when I re-inspected the device to discover, much to my embarrassment, two well implanted incisor teeth marks adjacent to a clasp. I could not help but fret about Gracie's reaction to the special-purpose bra and, more worrisome, my teeth marks there.

Life with Carole Ann Caldecott-Cooper - new four letter monograms and all - was never likely to be without surprises.

Chapter Sixteen

Before Scotty operates – a lunch with Babe and Britt?

Carole's concern we divulge the now re-scheduled October 15th ankle operation in advance to Babe and Britt began to appear on center stage as the electric two seat rail-tram on the bottom staircase was completed. My wife-to-be now had verification the two-stair project would be completed by the 13th and perhaps a day earlier.

"Suppose we offer to bring your parents a picnic lunch on Sunday the 11th?" she suggested. For several days she had been alluding to how it might be if we waited until *after* I was on crutches and simply appeared at the Cooper home on Sunnybrook; this was her first direct plan.

"How much would we tell them?" was my instant reaction.

"Consider we do it in two stages; first we simply have a visit, show off your recently attained B+ French paper, let them ask us questions and towards the end I casually bring up your ankle and explain the Caldecott family doctor is urging we have a new *cast* placed on it?"

"A hint rather than full disclosure, that's your plan?"

"That is level one. Then as we are leaving I again invite Britt to stop by on his way home from his office in Berkeley and suggest the 16th, which is Friday after the operation. Further, if I - we - bring him to at least partial confidence; how would he handle this knowledge Babe won't know?"

"Define *this knowledge* for me, please."

"My mindset tells me your father can be more easily brought into our facts than Babe; by now he has had the opportunity to verify just what it means to be a Caldecott and possibly heard at least a hint from someone that John Senior has been dead for several years. So we simply level with him; first, we are engaged; second, neither Hilda nor John are here very

often; and third, he can help us deal with your mother's anticipated reaction when she learns the same information. Yes? No?"

This was an entirely new thought process for me. Neither of my parents made a habit of keeping secrets, although both were unlikely to share information which might stress the other.

"This is based upon what? The way Hilda and John seem to maintain two separate, independent lives?"

"Not necessarily. It is clear your family is - well - more typical and mine atypical. Our lives together will come much closer to the Cooper model, modulated by significant resources I bring to the marriage. No, it is Britt's perception. Your mom's first reaction is always nurturing for her children; Britt has a wider perception of the future, while Babe mostly sees the present. It is the future where we try to expand her horizon and Britt can do that; he can get us past the hurdle of our not yet being 16 but to make that happen he needs to understand more specifically about that subject."

"I agree with all you said and as always my own thought processes are being nurtured the longer we are together. Are you really certain you are not, say, twenty rather than 15-plus?"

This discussion was, at Carole's lead, on the carpeted floor of John Senior's office, recently becoming his granddaughter's work place. And at her arrangement, we sat knees to knees holding hands, interrupted by gesturing for emphasis. Carole now broke that connection, slid her body forward and upwards, settling on my lap while stroking my hair and planting a long, moist kiss lips to lips. Sixty seconds or longer later, bending her head back only far enough to speak, she smiled.

"Alright - now you know my most secret-secret. I *am* a child molester, and you are the victim of a devious plan to gain control of a youthful body and mind. Now - what are you going to do about it?"

Sixty seconds later two bodies had become one and only dinner would interrupt us.

It was during my second helping of Tamale Pie that Carole would return us to the question of lunch with Britt and Babe.

Before Scotty operates — a lunch with Babe and Britt?

“Now my youthful victim has been rearmed with protein, your thoughts concerning Sunday?”

“Actually I have no problem with Sunday; a picnic lunch prepared here makes good sense. And the suggestion of a new cast for the ankle is brilliant. We might get through the entire Scotty episode with them never knowing the real facts and that will keep Babe from jumping into the mom protects her baby mode. Friday and Britt - that concerns me.”

“Be specific, please.”

“Scotty does his part the day prior. I am having difficulty dealing with my obvious condition and Britt being mind-diverted away from your new information as he sits staring at me in whatever condition I display. Fathers have a protective mechanism too and while it may not approach that of Babe, it will be difficult for him to focus on so much new information with me on crutches, or worse.”

“Interesting; a new thought for me. How about this, then. We postpone your operation until Saturday the 17th and you head for the ham station before Britt arrives. I will do this single-handed and you being up the hill hamming at W6HD will reinforce his belief that hanging out with electronic innovators is in fact real.”

“And school? We were planning for Tuesday or Wednesday to be our last attendance day; does that stay the same?”

Carole reacted by calling out to Gracie, who appeared in seconds from the kitchen side.

“Gracie, wait ten minutes for the Fried Ice Cream please, but you might remove these plates?”

This gave her a minute to go from real-time to instant replay for all of the arrangements created for home schooling through the end-of-year holiday break. I concentrated on finishing two remaining Tamale bites before my plate disappeared into the kitchen.

“Alright; good points. The school arrangements are in place and we'll start OJT visits Monday the 26th. George knows his part, your chemistry and my biology lab sessions will float to dates we will confirm just before Acalanes closes for the holidays. By postponing the operation until

Free, White & 16!

Saturday, I'm in favor of making Tuesday - the 13th - our last school day. I'll tell you why shortly; OK?"

"Yes and you apparently have something else in mind for Wednesday or even Thursday?"

She reached for my hand by stretching and gripping tightly before speaking.

"The radio station - or stations. I've wanted to take you into KWBR for a visit. George will drive us and frankly I need to spend a few hours in person to talk with my station manager. I'll introduce you as a family friend and we should not act connected beyond that while there; understood?"

"Oh my! Am I allowed to act like what it is and how it works - at least mechanically - is part of who I am?"

She re-gripped my hands, running her thumb and forefinger down several of my fingers individually. By the third finger she had it worked out.

"Of course - at some future point the staff will come to understand their boss has a full-time partner so your knowledge of what a station is and how it plugs together will be more easily accepted anyhow."

"Something I am curious about."

"Ask away."

"Senior died when you were ten; surely you did not instantly become the station staff's head-honcho at ten?"

"Perceptive. No, Senior left an administrative attorney in place and if we follow the letter of his will's instruction, I do not really obtain legal control until age 16. In fact there are several me-only will requirements that vary from 16 to 18 and finally 20 years of age. But two years ago I began visiting the station with the administrator and gradually over the last twelve months he has simply faded out. This actually is a logical progression, because virtually all modern radio is programmed for the youth market and the administrator is late 50s. The last thing he even can spell is R and B radio. KWBR is very focused on programming what was once termed race music, meaning it is native to black Americans. I identify with the sound and as you will learn, while there, the staff is totally oriented to it as well. Does that answer your question?"

Before Scotty operates – a lunch with Babe and Britt?

“And that is what awakens us each morning on the bedside radio?”

“You have been here virtually a month and haven’t worked that out yet??”

My faced turned a light shade of pink. “No, you turn it down and we head for the shower so quickly I never really worked it out. But now I understand. Does KWBR earn a profit?”

“An obscene one; in fact I am in the process of rebuilding both the DJ control room and Studio One right now with the excess. Do you know about tape?”

“Tape what?”

“Audio tape; specifically the Ampex machine?”

“Not much; I know it exists and Bing Crosby had something to do with its development.”

“Bad information, actually. Yes, he was the first *real* customer, but in fact there were twenty of them initially built in 1948 and serial number 019 is mounted inside a set of cabinets in Senior’s office. I own a rather healthy block of the original Ampex debentures, issued before they went public in ’52, and convertible at my whim - at 10 to 1 - to existing stock at market price.”

“I am in the same home as serial number 19?”

“It was granddad who taught me the value of being early, an example being that hopeless Corvette in the garage!”

“I repeat - are you certain you are not at least twenty-something?”

“I will take that as a compliment, my Bobby! In fact, the original twenty units were hand-assembled by a pair of third-year UC Berkeley EE students who lived in Lafayette; they called themselves Pedersen Electronics and it happened because Senior advanced them money to create a small shop where the original 200A could happen. And that - to end a story for now - is why serial number 19 is in Senior’s office.”

“We got onto tape recorders because of KWBR; please continue.”

“Several of the current models - 400s - are being installed at KWBR. They allow dual track recordings - stereo as it is becoming known now. But the real advantage is our ability to prerecord entire day parts - like 3

to 7PM - in an unused studio and play it back at the scheduled time. This eliminates the chaos of being live and actually creates a much tighter show, because it can be edited between initial recording and air time. Someday all radio stations will operate this way."

"Carole - you are my age. How in the devil have you become so fluent in so many subjects while managing a sizeable family empire? I am approaching overload."

"Overload? Remember overwhelm is OK with me; overload is a danger sign!"

"I correct myself; overwhelmed is my substitution; is that better?"

She leaned forward, re-grasping both hands and tenderly kissed my lips. "It is permissible for you to be overwhelmed on occasion; just not when the preacher asks 'Do you Robert Britt Cooper take Carole Ann Caldecott....' and so on. I can count on you to handle that?"

And I returned the kiss on my own initiative this time.

Chapter Seventeen

"Babe – tell us more!"

During the 12-minute trip from El Toyonal to Sunnybrook in Lafayette, Carole seemed unable to stop jabbering. I was handed the task of listening as she ran through a wide range of scenarios all involving my parents. In the month or so we had been sharing a bed, she was the most verbally excited I could recall and there had been many memorable discussions.

George parked appropriately and before he could open the rear left door for Carole, or I exited the right front, Babe was standing in front of us with Britt trailing far behind.

"Carole, my dear, I have the most exciting news!" she began. "It all happened just an hour ago - I almost called to tell you but Britt urged I wait until you were here. Well, you *are* here!"

That my mother was ignoring me totally was quite remarkable; nearly a month had passed since our last, inaugural, visit. A few telephone conversations - yes. But by Sunday to Sunday counts, basically a month.

"Babe - can this wait until we're inside?" It was Britt who had caught up with the turmoil occurring car-side.

My mother responded with a very strong hug for her yet-unknown-to-her first daughter-in-law, quickly squeezed my shoulder and immediately turned for the house. Carole was smiling and Britt was mostly following along.

Babe headed directly for the lounge, fairly bubbling with anticipation. "Carole, I had the most amazing telephone call barely an hour ago," she launched before Carole and I, by prearrangement, located our distant from one another seating.

"Yes, please continue," encouraged Carole, turning her head to me just briefly to wink in my direction. I would later understand why.

"The head of personnel for the Contra Costa County Library has offered me a position here in Lafayette; I will be responsible for the historical texts!"

Carole and I, although nobody noticed my reaction, responded with great gushes of warmth and praise. My mother continued unable to contain her reactions. "This is so perfect," she renewed her report. "I start Monday and the pay is actually better than as a teacher. Libraries have been my primary core for a decade but it has always been as an adjunct to a teaching position. Now - for the first time - I am going to be a librarian!"

And she collapsed, verbally exhausted. Carole, with a very deliberate reaction, said all of the correct statements, while I fantasized what we might reveal to my mother at that point and she would have responded something like *OK - good on you!* My fantasy included saying 'Oh by the way mom, Carole is pregnant and we will be married in April', but it was a fleeting moment that quickly dissipated. Babe was *that* happy.

The balance of the two-hour visit went precisely as Carol had planned; we consumed the basket lunch prepared by Gracie, they inspected my B+ French paper and when Carole, as preparatory for us leaving, mentioned "our family doctor plans to install a new plaster cast on Bobby's leg", Babe barely reacted. As we walked back to the patient George and the '48 Woody, Carole broached the Britt-visit topic right on schedule. He took her aside briefly, while I was assuring mother the new clothing she saw me wearing had not been a financial burden on the Caldecotts; which was when she reached into her skirt pocket to pass to me, she thought unobserved, two crisp \$100 bills. I bent down to kiss her on the forehead and to say thank-you. I would later have proof Carole either had two independent sets of eyes - for her back was towards me as she addressed Britt when this happened - or, well, there was always the witch possibility!

According to custom, we left Sunnybrook separated, with Carole in the front adjacent to George and me alone in the rear. This time George did not need to be asked to stop at the highway; he simply did and she immediately moved to the rear, hip to hip with her co-conspirator.

"Babe — tell us more!"

Carole leaned in close to my ear. "Today is the first day of my danger-zone. You may touch, but may not go further; understood?" And her pleated skirt was raised as an invitation.

A few minutes down highway 24 I could contain myself no longer. "You knew about the library offer in advance?"

"What makes you think that?"

"Your reaction largely. You were pleased she was so exuberant and how much this distracted her from everything that followed, but you *did* know about this before we arrived. In fact my dear, why do I suspect *you* arranged it?"

Carole responded by clasping her previously spread legs together, trapping my left arm and hand. "You are coming up to speed very nicely. Congratulations my love," and she leaned upward to kiss me gently on the forehead. "But remember - today is a danger zone!"

For our time together to this moment, if there had ever been a *right* time, well - today, the minute we hit home would have been it. Alas, no.

What I would learn, before a delayed dinner because of the late lunch, was what I had now come to accept as SOP; standard operating procedure for my fiancée.

"John-Original was a founding member of the county library, back when it took a day on horseback to ride from Orinda to Berkeley's first library and then return. From that founding to now, one or more Caldecotts has always served on the Library Board. Yes, I made a call to the current Chair and she in turn asked me to wait an hour before calling the head of personnel. So it took me just over an hour to arrange Babe's new position. And before you ask - two more things. Someday I will be on the Board as a replacement for never-here-anyhow Hilda, and we will continue to donate \$20,000 each year, or more perhaps, to the Contra Costa County Library system."

We were stepping out of the shower when this factual statement flowed. The shower had been rewarding, for me anyhow, and Carole seemed more than pleased to have engineered such a successful day. Next stop; Britt's visit.

Chapter Eighteen

All of these people are – well – black??

Everything was on schedule – that was, Carole's schedule. We abandoned Acalanes on Tuesday the 13th after she confirmed all arrangements with both the school principal and our respective teachers. It concerned me that two of us, Carole and I, who seemingly had no direct connection, were both involved in the home schooling change on the same day and with identical classes except science.

"Not to be fretted about," Carole repeatedly assured me. "The school has 1,200 students and two out of that enrollment will not even be noticed; I have covered our tracks completely, other than the 12th graders who start the second Monday for our private tutoring. So stop your fears, please; your future wife has it under control!"

I would accept her confirmation; in the worst case our story would be short-term school gossip and in the best case nobody would even notice us missing save for the two consecutive empty seats in French 1, along the entry door wall.

By Wednesday morning, conjugal relations were fully back on and our normal fifteen minute shower stretched to thirty minutes and change. Resting on a granite seat with someone on my lap while a brisk shower head cloaked us in warm water was a totally new experience for me, and Carole as well reveled in the discovery. She was always one step ahead in planning. No, life was never going to be

"George will drive us to Oakland and KWBR at 10," she advised during the joint towelling exercise. "We will probably be there for several hours and there is a totally outrageous Greek restaurant just down the street where lunch will be my treat - even if Babe handed you \$200 on Sunday." I

held no idea from my pre-Carole life what Greek restaurant meant. I would shortly learn.

By 10:30 I was being introduced to Stanley, the station manager. "Miss Carole," as he addressed her, was quickly an obvious special name she allowed him; the entire balance of the staff called her "Miss" or "Ms" *Caldecott*. As we walked down a tiled hallway from Stanley's office to the triplet studios, I asked about this.

"Stan or Stanley if you prefer is only 22," she began. "He, like the full staff, lives and breathes R and B. This is their life and he is the key element to financial success of the station. At the end of the month and year, Stanley not only pays the bills, he creates the surplus I am investing in modernizing the station; not just here but the sister station in Fresno; one of my least favorite spots in California."

I would try to frame the next statement carefully. The station staff was terribly positive when seeing Carole, and after perhaps ten such, "Hello sister - how've you been?" type greetings, it occurred to me not one of them had been - well - *white*. I asked, using the *black* word.

"Bobby, R and B or rhythm and blues; it is music originating in black America. It dates back before the 20s in fact. The Bay Area, but especially Oakland and the adjacent areas, are more black than white. We program for them, not the white folks who live on Knob Hill across The Bay. So it only makes sense that our staff reflects the audience; is that difficult for you to accept?"

Not difficult; just new. I thought I understood radio, but obviously not to the level of Carole. My education was progressing and it was dawning on me why she had in fact included me in the visit; Bobby was on a new learning curve.

"After your technical tour, join Stan and me in his office. We will be talking about where R and B is headed. He and I disagree, not in principal, just in timing. Alright?"

My tour included the carpenters busy recreating both the DJ control room and the primary studio. All DJs were live and had been moved to Studio 2 while Carole's re-work was being completed. I learned most of

All of these people are – well – black??

the actual construction occurred at night to minimise the disruption to the station's 24-hour format and in both rooms I noticed still factory sealed Ampex model 400 tape decks, at least two per room. Thirty minutes after Stan's assistant started the tour, I knocked and walked into the office. They were listening to a tape - from an unpacked, functional Ampex machine, and the fellow I heard in the speakers was definitely, one - not black, and, two - not Californian. I sat down in a chair and listened with them for perhaps ten minutes while nobody said a word, only the sounds from the speakers.

Carole motioned for Stan to stop the tape. "Cool Stan," she began. "So explain to me why Alan Freed doesn't want to move to California?"

"Miss Carole," he answered, "this is one far-out cat. His first problem was Oakland - he thought I was saying Auckland, which is in New Zealand of course. 'This cat don't purr in a far-away pad that has no R and B' was his first reaction. So I explained Oakland was part of San Francisco and he listened while I described our format, offering to send him either a vinyl or a tape of us. He didn't know from tape, which means where he is on-air they are behind current technology. Anyhow, I suggested the pay rate you authorized and he laughed. So I added 10 Gs to that number, beyond what you authorized, and he paused for maybe five seconds before telling me 'Man I dig The Big Apple; if you guys were there, I'd be-bop on the next big bird. But gracias amigo for making my day,' and he hung up on me."

Carole's reaction was totally new to me, a silent observer in a corner chair. "He is the future of radio," she began, standing to thump her fist on Stan's desk. It was the thumping that got my attention and Stan's as well. "He knows and understands R and B; the fact that he is white tells me this cat is at the front of a parade that will, as soon as we have the music to support it, start a revolution in radio listening." I would three, four and five years later in life as Carole's husband recall her statement again and again. She, a not-yet sixteen year old 'poor-little rich-kid' from the hills of Orinda, be a half-generation ahead of anyone then in the radio business. Stan may have agreed with her at that moment in time, but he was powerless to change Freed's mind.

"Here is plan B," Carole restarted. "We contract him to allow KWBR to replay his Cleveland shows here. We make this happen with an Ampex 400 shipped to his station and they in turn feed us the tapes. And we pay him a suitable fee for reuse of his show. I want Alan Freed on air *here* and no matter what he wants for our replay, you can surely sell it for more than his fees and the cost of getting it here. Is that made-in-the-shade, Stan?"

Both Stan and I quickly realized the wisdom of Carole's concept. I may not have known Alan Freed from Dave Garroway, but her intuition was obvious. Freed attracted huge audiences and if Carole and Stan had him on air, even if on-tape, the station would continue to be the leading outlet for game-changing music. "All we need is a steady diet of Crazy Man Crazy releases," was Stan's reaction. The exchange that followed was so far-out I knew I would be able to repeat it verbatim years later; which I did at every opportunity.

"Look Miss Carole, from mid-June to mid-July, we averaged eight calls each hour asking us to spin Bill Haley's Crazy Man Crazy. Late in June it actually reached number eleven on the Billboard Chart; no R and B has ever done that before. But here at KWBR, it was the *most* requested music for a month. We ended up playing it once an hour for weeks. But one song cannot make a format. What we need, somehow, is maybe 10 to 20 Crazy Man Crazy *like* releases each month. Can your crystal ball tell me when that will happen?"

"Not soon enough for me!" she responded. "Freed is for this moment in time boss- unique, so why can't we create some Freed sound-alikes from right here? Surely there are listeners who, having once heard Freed, will identify with both his presentation style and music selections?"

"How do you suggest we do that?"

"The WJW tape. Edit it to say an hour, present it as our 'Moondog Special' and watch the phones go into melt-down."

"Don't we need his - someone's - permission to re-air his show?"

"I am willing to chance that after you reediting of the two hours, perhaps into sixty or ninety minutes, it will be so different from the Freed

All of these people are – well – black??

original it will by copyright be considered a new creation. Anyhow, drop that concern; I'll be responsible."

"You are serious?"

"Totally serious; Ampex edit time is precious until we have the new 400s installed. Can you do it by say Sunday evening?"

"*This* Sunday evening?"

"The 18th; 7PM."

"And you'll assume responsibility?"

"I am the station owner; the buck stops here! Oh yes, I plan to be here when it airs and want to answer some of the calls myself."

All of this exchange had been imprinted in my long-term memory index; there was no way my bride-to-be was my age! Copyright? New creation? It would play and replay as we left the station and I recalled something she had imprinted earlier; "on April 20th you move from fiancé to owning half of everything I do." Radio station? Stations? As she hand-led the way down the block walk to a tiny, almost hidden restaurant, my mind was reaffirming the status of Robert Britt Cooper - less the junior: forever and a day.

Chapter Nineteen

"Hello Britt – welcome to your new daughter-in-law's Hacienda"

For the next two days my rapidly developing mind had played and replayed Carole's command of her radio station investment. Station manager Stan had allowed me to leave with a stack of Ampex data sheets including an operational manual for the model 400 tape recorder after determining with rudimentary questioning my interest in the electronics side of his business. He actually seemed pleased Miss Carole had a friend who could talk the technical language of 1953. He, like Carole, was exceptional for his young age, although a sixty-second conversation with their in-house technical guru had left me slightly nervous as to the engineer's ultimate qualifications. But nothing had been said to Carole concerning this; it was merely a feeling running through my mind and if the subject had been broached to my fiancée - well - I would have had nothing but intuition to support my admittedly weak concerns. It would all play out in the future. But today was Friday and Britt was scheduled at the entrance gate facing El Toyonal around 3:30. Carole had it timed to the split second; when he appeared at the closed gate, Bobby would go out a side door, walk to the waiting tram-car, and head for hilltop. And she would call me on the intercom when appropriate to return.

"Do our algebra and when finished correct my edited lit paper," were my instructions. "I will be in Senior's office working on investment matters." I understood the office alcove she called 'Senior's' had become Carole's newly adopted headquarters for overseeing the complex family structure; we were approaching the fifth anniversary of his unfortunate death and instinctively knew it would be a cloud over the Christmas holiday period. "I'll see you for lunch," and she was off.

Algebra and her English paper took barely 45 minutes and conscious the coming week could be complicated by the rebuilding of my ankle, now barely 24 hours away, it seemed prudent to move ahead another week. Each Acalanes class had provided material for several weeks in advance, so moving into future work was merely a matter of turning a page. By noon I would be three weeks ahead with algebra and lacking Carole's next hand-drafted English assignment, I wrote one for her. The only confusion came when it became apparent her work, and mine, had to be so totally different as to not look like the same individual had done both. By thinking-Carole it suddenly became very easy to write not one, but two, advance papers as if they had come from her complex mind. It would turn out to be one of the best training exercises of my life; words from me said one thing, thoughts from Carole something often quite different. Without realizing what was happening, I was adopting the style of a novelist.

Britt's arrival was several minutes early, but the buzz of the gate intercom sent me off to the tram. "Think positive thoughts!" were the last words I would hear from my-gal for what stretched out to more than two hours. The last hour was the difficult one.

"Bobby - can you come down, please?" were the words I heard after dropping the handset twice in a nervous fit following the buzzer.

"You are not alone?" I responded; her formal tone sounding - well - formal.

"Correct - come now," was the response.

We had not discussed the possibility Britt might still be there when I returned; there had been no prep for that eventuality. It would be the longest 90-second tram descent of my life - before or after today. And in fact by the time I had the ham gear turned off, the door and gate locked and sitting ready to push the lever, the elapsed time from message to arriving at the bottom would push four minutes. From 30 yards to stop I clearly made out Carole, *and* my father. Not wetting my pants seemed like a major challenge; why had I not detoured to use the bathroom before the trip down??

"Carole this is one very nice design," were the first words I could distinguish from the time the pair came into view. Carole had been arm-gestur-

"Hello Britt—welcome to your new daughter-in-law's Hacienda"

ing and Britt was talking - if mostly unheard by me - far more than normal for him. The tram stopped automatically, although my hand was prepared to pull the lever and with great smiles and more exuberance than I could recall, my father strode the few steps to me, exiting. I anticipated a greeting, but he pushed past to climb into the tram-car and inspect the interior controls. It was his first statement that held a clue how far Carole had gone in their discussion.

"Senior was an exceptional engineer!" *Was* would be the operative word here.

"Carole, when I next return you will take me to the top?"

To this point I was akin to chopped liver; he hadn't even uttered 'hello son'.

"Of course; we have a date and I do not renege on promises."

Britt continued to sit; Carole moved to take my hand and warmly kissed the back. That she did this was helping me understand just how far her conversation with my father had evolved. My response was to raise her hand and return the physical contact. Britt was smiling more broadly than I could ever remember.

Now he reached for a metal support bar lifting his 44-year-old frame to a standing position, stepping out two steps, ending only inches from his son and future daughter-in-law.

"Bobby," he began - if he had previously before addressed me as Bobby it was not in memory - "you may well be the most fortunate almost-sixteen-year-old on the face of this Earth. Carole is well beyond anything I ever hoped for you. Congratulations!"

I was stupefied. Congratulations? For what pray tell??

He would continue, which was a godsend, as I had no idea how to respond.

"Carole has filled me in on why her parents are not here, the reason she and you will be married on your joint 16th birthdays, and I am left with working out how to explain this to your mother." I believed he was done for now, but was wrong!

"I eagerly anticipate the birth of my first grandson, Andrew. If he is anything like his mother, he might become President of this country."

My father, Britt, was not one given to any level of exuberance. Actually, he was a model for me of Abe Lincoln; definitely not Teddy Roosevelt. A sideways glance at Carole, still clinging to my left hand, revealed full facial smiles.

"Britt," she began and he interrupted her - totally against everything taught me.

"Carole, daughter, I hoped you would call me dad."

She restarted. "Please, no lack of love or trust but I have not had a dad for perhaps ten years and my mind reserves dad for Andrew who will address Bobby with that noun. Oh yes, just to be certain there is no misunderstanding, you will wait six years for Andrew."

I could see the wheels clicking in my dad's eyes. "50? Well now, if this works out where Andrew is also 22 when he has his first son, my first great-grandchild, I will be 72. I can live for that!"

A weak breeze and strong feather would have dropped me to the ground for a 10-count. I had no concept of what he knew, what to say, how to deal with his already planning a great-grandson. If somehow I could release Carole's hand, climbing back onto the tram, returning to hilltop would have been my choice. Carole to the rescue, as always.

"Britt, I do not expect you to assimilate all I have shared on this first visit. Feel free, please, to call or ask anything your mind creates when visiting in the future."

If there was a this-is-over-for-now ending statement, Carole had just vocalized it. Britt quite correctly interpreted her words and within three minutes his 1953 company Chevrolet wagon would be heading for the steel gate, which Carole opened remotely by pushing a button.

Standing with her in the kitchen, where Gracie frittered over a fresh salmon steak dinner still at least an hour away, we held hands and then her arms slid around my waist from the side as four eyes watched the distant gate closing. I was brain-dead; no words were forming which left my vocal cords dormant. One silent phrase was playing in an endless loop over and over again; 'I do not know how she did it, but Carole has created a happy ending one more time'!

"Hello Britt—welcome to your new daughter-in-law's Hacienda"

"I feel like 'Gone with the Wind'," she offered. At the time it was one of only three prints stored with a red tag; by April 1955 a new red-tagged edition, 'Blackboard Jungle' in an unedited print which included the Bill Haley contribution of Rock Around the Clock, would also be on the shelf. "Can you please thread the machine while I speak with Gracie?" I, too, was being dismissed; however briefly. Yes, I could do that, but concerned we would barely get through a third of the film before salmon steak was served, I said so.

"I wish to hear the line *tomorrow is another day* because we have Scotty to deal with," was her response. Indeed it would be.

Chapter Twenty

"May I have more pain killer? Please!"

Saturday's ankle operation would linger in my mind, and unfortunately Carole's as well, for decades. As skilled as Doctor Abraham Scott was, as competent as his attending nurse Sara Franklin would be, it did not go as anticipated. And Carole, against the advice of Scotty, sat in a corner wringing her hands a la Gracie for most of the hour-plus procedure. It was not merely that it hurt, but more the pain was unmanageable. And this was after administering copious amounts of standby morphine.

Nothing remained in my conscious mind following the first injection; not the operation nor the ride home or even the staircase tramway ride where, Carole would later recount, George walked aside and somehow shifted me from the end of spiral staircase one to the start of two, and then finally managed me into our bedroom. It would be after 7AM on Sunday when I again, briefly, became awake and Carole, as it turned out, had slept not a minute from the arrival home to my regaining conscious thought. It was the R and B of KWBR that brought me around the first time; the alarm radio at Carole's bedside.

"Are you coherent?" she asked. I smiled but did not respond.

"I have prayed all night; please tell me this was not all a bad mistake. Oh my, I pushed you to do this; please say it will turn out OK?"

That Carole said she had prayed all night was actually registering with me. To this point in our joint lives prayer had never been a subject for dialogue. But everything else was a blur and before I could do more than respond "I love you Carole Cooper..." the eyelids closed for what would be several additional hours.

When I did reawaken it would be nearly 10 and the first human to register was Doctor Scott, standing beside the bed with an injection device - needle - half the size of my arm in his hand. It turned out to be standard size but as my eyes opened it did appear *much* larger. He had not yet used it and perhaps my awakening was some level of subconscious message he was about to do so.

"Scotty?" I murmured.

"Bobby, I am about to inject you with another morphine shot; tell me first, how bad is the pain? The less we use of this the sooner you will return to normal."

Normal was a foreign word to my hazy mind. What did it mean? But according to Carole much later, I did smile, and as it turned out, try to determine just how badly I hurt. In fact the answer would be positive.

"Actually, sir, my ankle is pretty pain-free. Mostly I'm very tired and possibly hungry. More than that, I'd really like to use the bathroom!"

Doctor Scott placed the prepared needle down as for the first time my-Carole came into eye focus. She had been standing immediately adjacent to Scotty all that time and to her side, nurse Franklin.

"Bobby, the cast has not been installed; there is only a pressure wrap on your ankle. You cannot place any - I repeat *any* - standing strain on your right ankle. There is a wheelchair here to move you into the bathroom. I will help you into it; Carole will take you to the toilet and you will do exactly as she tells you; remember - no weight on your ankle until we have a cast fitted."

Relieved of the bladder pressure and somehow back in bed, Carole's primary concern switched to the leakage she noticed on the bed sheets.

"He bled far more than I expected," was vaguely heard. "It was an error on my part; we should have done this at Kaiser, not in my office." And I lapsed into sleep again.

Awakening again from drug-induced slumber, laying flat on my back - a posture never assumed in bed either before or during Carole - slowly it became apparent I was not alone; a hand, connected to an arm, spread across my chest; my fiancée, somehow compressed into a sliver of unoccupied

bed and on her side. She was asleep. No clock was visible, but after a few minutes of being awake and reluctant to disturb Carole, the sun shadows suggested to my mind it was past 12 noon. Equally important, recognition that no part of me pained; the ankle indeed felt strange but no longer throbbed in time to my heartbeat.

Trusting whatever remained of common sense, I tried to wiggle my right foot toes. They did move and I could tell; good. But moving the leg proper? I dared not attempt.

Carole stirred and then snapped awake in one quick recovery. "Bobby? Are you awake? Oh, thank God!"

I murmured a response, perhaps incoherent, but at least vocal.

"My darling," she restarted, grasping me tightly with her embracing right arm while streaming tears covered her face, "I am so sorry; so very sorry! If I had known, even suspected with a ten percent chance, this might happen - I would have insisted upon a different correction procedure. I owe you one, perhaps two, doses of guilt!"

Coherence was returning to me, but not very rapidly. Carole was, of course, in no way responsible for the pain, but the anguish she felt was very evident, even to my doped mind.

"Wife of mine, you are not responsible. The pain is more than worth the end result; when I recover, and I shall, it will last us both a lifetime." I had no idea where this response originated, but Carole would likely be repeating parts of it verbatim to our grandchildren thirty years hence.

A meal would follow rather quickly - Carole had Gracie on quick response and George more than anxious to transport twin trays to our room. I was and would for the balance of my life be grateful to one timing change; that being? That Britt had *not* been scheduled to visit with Carole the day *following* the ankle operation. Carole would be first to bring the subject up for discussion.

"My conversation with your dad would never have worked with you lying in bed under the effects of morphine; thanks-be-to-God *you* suggested we schedule his visit before, not after, the operation!"

I had my own thanks-be-to-God and it would be borderline hallucinatory. I was pleased, in my available hours back on Friday, algebra and

English Lit had been done for two-plus weeks into the future. It was a silly thought, of course, but then my mind was still secreting the post-operation effects of morphine.

Carole's lack of sleep rapidly became an issue; she would not again experience a 30+ hour period such as this until Andrew's birth. And when that occurred I too would spend more than thirty sleepless hours, as would Britt and Babe.

By Monday my ankle would be stable enough, after a late Sunday visit by Scotty, for George to drive us down to the doctor's office. The preformed plaster cast, created in San Francisco at a facility I would much later in life learn charged Carole more than a thousand dollars, was waiting; two halves to be fitted, trimmed, and secured. One side reminded me of a hinge, the other of a clasping system. Scotty fidgeted and adjusted for more than 30 minutes; as would quickly be evident he felt the same *guilt* as Carole for the way the ankle operation procedure had been handled. But, by tradition, Scotty would ultimately deliver Andrew and then Anita from Carole's womb; we obviously carried no malice about the treatment of my ankle. Alas, this would be sometime into the future.

It would be George who provided the intelligent relief. I arrived at Dr Scott's in a wheelchair, left with twin crutches, but the chair would return home with us. As I teetered into the house on two wooden devices which felt unpleasant and did nothing for my posture, George suggested, "for trip upstairs Mister Bobby sit down?" He was pointing at the wheelchair he had brought in directly behind Carole and me.

Totally sensible; once in the chair, George pushed it onto the stairway tram and with inches to spare, Carole's design measurements just fit. Now on floor two, off the tram platform, across the tile floor and onto the second tram. George stayed with us until we reached our room and to much admiration and thanks departed with a toothy smile; he had contributed and it had been good.

Scotty visited El Toyonal on Tuesday, and Wednesday, and Thursday to the point of, '*when* we need you we will call'. If my recognition of his devotion to first the Caldecotts, and mostly Carole, had not registered previously

"May I have more pain killer? Please!"

- by Thursday it was ingrained. Scotty was giving up both practice and family-time to check and recheck the progress of my ankle. About which, in fact, inside a custom designed plaster cast one could determine almost nothing save from his detailed questions concerning my aches, pains and overall feeling. Later in life I would in some seriousness suggest, to Carole, the middle name for Andrew "might be Abraham" which she would in fact consider, however briefly.

Chapter Twenty-One

Bam, crash, bang!

Much to my chagrin, for most hours each day I was confined to our bed without Carole, who did check on me every 30 minutes or so, but largely devoted herself to John Senior's alcove. She would always share her time away and I was gradually learning more and more about the complications of what she termed *The Caldecott Estate*, marvelling with each new revelation how at 15-plus she was able to, could, did cope with the details.

My first clue of something unusual was the sound of a vehicle in the driveway, just outside the front door, obviously inside the locked and secured front gate. Flat on my back I could but ponder who might be there. It was Sunday October 25th; 8 days after Scotty rebuilt my ankle.

My concern intensified when I heard first one and then two new-to-me voices addressing Gracie, and within seconds Carole's alarmed response. There was one female, one male; Hilda - and John - *home??* If I would later in life recall the lead-up to the ankle operation with trepidation, this event would be that squared.

The dialogue was unclear and only a few words, repeated more than once, wafted through two floor levels to my ears. "Argentina" was one of those words. Another set of words was "cattle ranch" but they came as singles, only melded after being repeated multiple times. Carole's voice was most distinct; perhaps her position on the bottom floor helped it modulate to floor three.

There followed an abundance of noise; people were obviously moving around floors one and two in some haste. After ten minutes Carole appeared in our doorway with a face of sheer terror.

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"This is not good," she announced with emotion. "They will probably only be here 30 minutes or so."

Lying in bed unable to move without assistance was a disadvantage of course; and what would I say, or do, if I went down? "Stay here and I'll have them gone as soon as possible." As if I had a choice! Never during my six weeks with Carole had I observed such a lack of composure. Miss have-it-all-under-control apparently did not.

"These are your mother and father?"

"Hilda and John! Remember my rule about how I address them, please." Carole, even in anxiety, did not forget her rules.

"And they are here - why?"

"I'll try to explain it in detail after they depart but in a synopsis - they are leaving, together, for Argentina, where a cattle ranch is being purchased."

Everything I had understood about them said *together* was not an operative description. And I asked point blank.

"I'm working on that - believe me! I may have an answer and if correct it goes back to Senior's will. But they *are* here and I have the opportunity to do something never expected. I love you Bobby, but for us - both of us - I need to be down there, *now!*" And Carole, kissing me on the forehead, headed back.

It would be approaching an hour before John and Hilda's limousine disappeared down the driveway; by squinting, a small segment of the drive was visible through a window and I saw them whiz by that point. Carole returned to our bedroom shortly after.

"That was close," she began. "I have never explained the details of Senior's will and tonight I promise to attempt; but in summary either Hilda or John Junior can spend - invest in their language - up to five million dollars but no more without the other's agreement. Well, these two totally crazy people have somehow convinced the other they need one another enough to go into a joint venture of nine million to purchase a cattle ranch in west or central Argentina; Cordoba. Think of how much good nine million dollars could do here in California!" And with that Carole sat

down at my side on the by-now tiresome bed and began to cry; large drops, covering her face. Nothing I could do, or say, would impede the flow of tears stretching perhaps ten minutes. She would restart first.

"I cannot believe *his* sperm and *her* egg created *me*; it is just beyond comprehension! Nor am I sorry you did not meet them; if we are really blessed, our lives will mature without you *ever* meeting them!" And the crying resumed anew as she deposited the raven-colored head snugly onto my chest.

Rubbing Carole's shoulders, back and forehead had no immediate dimming effect. She simply continued sobbing and if she had felt helpless after my ankle operation, I now shared that feeling. 'But they *are* her parents' ran through my mind over and over again 'even if they are jerks'. And, 'they abandoned her some time ago and this is more about being turned into ourgal-Sunday than the Hilda and John selfishness'.

Well, not quite. Whatever the IQs of Hilda and John individually, combined they would in fact not equal Carole's. However gene exchange really worked in the biological world, Carole was the one in a million, perhaps billion, exception. 'Dumb + dumb' did not add up to Carole, as her next statements would verify.

"Bobby, I did it."

"Pardon?"

"In their rush to collect some important documents - the only reason they came here - I stopped them long enough to obtain signatures on several dozen pieces of paper. They never looked at what they were signing."

"Carole - can you explain, please?"

"A synopsis and I promise to go into detail after dinner. I - we - would be better for their authentic signature-approval to be married at 16, and on other documents. I always keep a folder ready with the latest family legal instruments should they - in fact - show up unannounced as they did today. Hilda and John today both signed papers that not only give me their permission to be married at sixteen but - if it comes to push - I *now* possess controls Her does not have on their share of the Senior estate. They may fly down to Argentina and invest nine million trust dollars, but - well, I am now two signatures ahead of Her."

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This was a mystery wrapped inside of total confusion for me; it required several minutes to recall 'Her' was unmentionable sister Suzanne. Beyond that I would await the now scheduled 'after dinner' detailed explanation. It did occur to me Britt might know more about this than I, a fleeting thought. Actually, this would turn out to be true.

Sometime after Hilda and John departed, Carole again arrived in our bedroom lugging a box overflowing with file folders. It soon became apparent, following her careful rechecking of the files at the foot of the bed where prior to my operation we often sat together, I was in for a major 'show 'n tell'.

"Bobby, tonight I suggest you use the crutches and we go down to Gracie for dinner; at least for now, hand-delivered tray service is over."

Escaping from the bed was high on my list of priorities and there was no argument, but the delay in my answering was, as had become common, enough for her to restart.

"OJT starts tomorrow and it would be best if we meet the tutor individually in the Library; not with you confined to our bed. Consider this a practice for Monday afternoon!"

And so with crutches-under-armpits and Carole's hand or hands on my shoulders the trip down two tram-assisted flights was done; in fact following one of Gracie's best-ever Mexican dinners the return upstairs would be without incident. The open file box was of course beckoning. Propping pillows, attentive to my comfort, it was just past 7 when Miss Caldecott began an oratory stretching to past 10. I had never before, and perhaps would never again be asked to absorb so much information in one sitting. It was interrupted only around 9PM by my asking for assistance in using the toilet.

Every thirty minutes or so my bride-to-be would do a summary of the most recently imparted information and then pause for questions. I had several, which she would in turn explain or re-explain before launching into her following segment. From start to finish the demonstration was *pure Carole*, never expurgated or faltering, without more than a medium-level deep breath. 'Perhaps Britt is correct' drifted through my mind several times; 'Andrew *might* grow up to be President!' Or perhaps Anita.

The summary of what I had been told, taught would be more appropriate, included the following:

First - John Senior's Trusts contained detailed instructions concerning when each beneficiary would or could connect to the family assets. Both Her and Carole were tiered, with some assets moving from Trust to their access at ages 16, 18 and 20; I had understood this in a general way previously, but as Carole went through a series of alphabetized file folders in sequence, the magnitude of the assets involved grew exponentially. I was more than impressed; overloaded was the best word, although it could not be used, safely, with Carole.

Second, Her had discovered, with the assistance of non-family legal counsel, a single sentence which allowed some of the rules to change. While the Trust limited full participation in the family's interests, including the more than 3,000 acres of land Senior left behind, a sentence added by hand and initialled appropriately after the typed copy had been prepared began, "In the event she shall marry before her twentieth birthday...". With that in hand, 'Her' had married shortly after her 18th and now enjoyed the same legal position as Hilda and John Junior; she, in effect, could leverage the acreage up to five million dollars against the asset's value.

And this led me, for the first time, to question to myself what getting married on *our* 16th birthday was *really* all about; protecting Carole's 25% interest from Her? As would be shown to me with accounting documents obtained under some duress from Her, a husband who had a passion for ponies, roulette wheels, and expensive toys was basically cleaning Her out. His name, Avery Curtis Thompson, dominated the top of Carole's anger list. "He graduated cum laude from Harvard's MBA School," she began, and my fiancée's description sped rapidly downhill from this starting point.

As luck, fate, or lack of breath may have determined, this information occurred just prior to a break point, which *should* have allowed me to react. I did not and it would be years later, when the lecture replayed in my mind, I realized she had anticipated a reaction to selecting me for a 16th birthday marriage which extended beyond her love for my mind and body. To *question* her never entered my mind that evening.

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"You do understand," she restated to encourage a positive response, "we face two challenges; the first is to be legally wed at 16, which involves individual state or county laws, and the second is to insure Her and husband do not wipe out the asset value of Senior's holdings before I have a legal position here?"

I did but it *still* never fully registered to me Robert Britt Cooper was perhaps being used for some sort of personal financial gain, or a vendetta against a sister. And it was most fortunate my mind did *not* go there, for in fact forever-and-a-day was what Carole Caldecott was *really* all about. I was correctly, as my father had suggested, 'the most fortunate almost-sixteen-year-old on the face of Earth'.

"Look here at the hand-lettered addition to the base document," thrusting an already opened file folder into my hands. "Read the full paragraph to yourself and then comment, please."

I did as instructed, absorbing the thought and care Senior had put into creating safeguards designed to protect the family-whole from some sort of financial madness by a maverick single member. Clearly it intended for Suzanne and Carole to have annual income but no ownership voting rights until each became 20. But there in block letters printed by hand, with reference to both granddaughters, the exception: "In the event she shall marry before her twentieth birthday...".

"There is no question - none at all - this added sentence was inserted by John Senior?"

"None; not an issue. Look again at the sentence - does anything about it tickle your memory cells?"

Reading, rereading the 18 words did nothing new for me. But then something did; wait a minute! The block lettering, it was somehow memorable - but what? I asked aloud.

Carole's reaction was instantaneous; a strong hug followed by a lingering moist kiss, and the immediate appearance of a much smaller folder.

"Remember this?" placing a single small sheet of notebook paper before my eyes.

*Hi immigrant. My name is Carole and I live in Orinda.
Perhaps you need some help with French? RSVP
(Respondez s'il vous plait).*

My reaction was totally predictable. "But I have this myself, stored as a marker for my French class book?"

"Look more closely - a carbon copy. The note to you was prepared here at home the night before we first met. I've saved this for our children but that is not the point. Compare the block writing style between my first note to you with the amendment to Senior's trust instructions."

They were identical, one indistinguishable from the other. Now I was totally confused.

"I once said there are no family signatures I cannot replicate to the level of being unchallenged for authenticity. Senior *did* write the amendment; *I* wrote the note to you. Senior had really awful cursive style and printed everything. When Junior began his maverick ways I was five and Her eight. Senior became my father-figure; Hilda delighted herself by treating my sister as a self-replica. I grew up under Senior's influence, Her under Hilda's. So that original note to you in French class? If my instincts concerning the boy in front of me were correct, it was only fitting it be in Senior's print style!"

This hug lasted, and lasted, and lingered. Carole's hand as she finally separated our bodies brushed against my Jockey shorts. She grinned, but said nothing.

Chapter Twenty-Two

"Oh yes – before tutoring I have more"

Following our first attempt with an intimate shower Monday morning, not successful and then, thirty minutes to drain water from my cast, during breakfast in the alcove Carole had several pronouncements.

"I did record last week's KWBR Moondog Special and we should listen to it, together, after breakfast. As much as I wanted to be there to hear and answer phone calls, Stan advises it went superbly and he is now very keen to pursue this as a regular feature."

I smiled and intended to offer a response, but she continued before even the first word left my vocal chords.

"Last night we progressed through half of my box of file folders. Before the OJT tutor appears around four, might we restart? I don't expect we will complete this today, but it is important for me to create a totally clean-slate between you and I."

"Well, yes, but might you also find time to review the papers I have done on our joint behalf?" This was in reference to my pre-operation effort to get weeks ahead in as many courses as possible. As events had transpired, Carole had not yet reviewed any of these.

She took both my hands, an effort because powder sugar coated French toast was heading for my lips and the fork got in the way. "Of course; and I want you to know this last ten days should not be how it shall continue much longer. We *will* do our school together; that *is* my plan!"

In my slowly returning mind, each of us had our own assignment and when circumstances allowed, we would share time. Carole's Caldecott Estate workload had been minimal during our first weeks of courting and together we had sorted through my parents, school, a brief time dealing

with KWBR and then the unfortunate ankle experience. But the surprise appearance of Hilda and John seemed to mark a turning point for my fiancée; what I did not yet understand was the amount of effort she would be expending digging through file drawers and on the telephone with several attorneys ranging from those representing Hilda and John to a far-from-cordial law firm representing Her and MBA'ed husband. Sharing the balance of the files would help over time, but little of it would be immediate.

In an effort to catch up, Carole sat me down and switched on serial number 19 of the Ampex machine where she had used a preset timer to record the Moondog Special. We both began by listening intently holding hands and then she dropped one hand and began to read the two English Lit papers drafted in her name and, I hoped, style.

This was OK - she had previously listened to much of the Alan Freed material and while Stan's creative editing made it sound significantly new, we were at least sitting together; closely. I had missed the physical presence and silently hoped she had as well. What would not become evident, much less register with me until later in the week, was the hugeness of the challenge she was wrestling to understand. And it would finally take root in my mind because of a long running radio soap opera titled 'Our-Gal-Sunday'.

Moondog finished; Stan had done an exquisite job cutting around Freed's frequent mention of his sponsor, a chain of Cleveland-area stores called Record Rendezvous, and the credits for same slipped through only once in sixty edited minutes. "Your Stan is actually very good; a network quality talent," I began. That was as far as I got, for the moment.

"The original tape was supplied by a Chicago air-check service; we will now be receiving two new hours each week via air."

"And Freed?"

"\$100 a week and Stan talked him into creating promos to run on KWBR throughout the week in advance of the 7PM slot each Sunday. I expect we will have Moondog sponsored here by the end of this week; Stan is urging we rerun the same show mid-week as well, which would make the airtime easier to swallow; \$400 a week!"

"My dear, I really like this investment!"

"Oh yes — before tutoring I have more"

"I saw the fit immediately, even before you knew of KWBR. Now, about school work?"

During the rerun of Moondog, Carole had finally dropped both hands and in a couple of spots on English papers, softly marked several points. Unlike the other classes where workbooks were provided, this one largely revolved around a weekly creative paper on an assigned topic; 500 to 1,000 words. For the workbook classes, I had completed my own and she would either copy or change the answers in her copy. The perforated pages were to be removed, stapled together, and sent back with the OJT. We expected some two-way dialog with the OJT; if it was merely a paper turning-in exercise there would be little reason for the at-home visits.

"May I make a suggestion or two; even three?"

She clasped our hands again. "Of course."

"I can complete four classes, everything but English, in four total hours; that's a week's worth. English requires perhaps two additional hours; I type rapidly and back in ninth grade my English teacher accused me of having diarrhea of the fingers" provoking instant Carole laughter in response.

"My suggestion. Let me do the school work, you concentrate on the estate. At some point each week you'll need to copy from my material to your workbook sheets, making enough change to each so the OJT does not suspect only one of us is actually attending home-classes. Now as for English..."

And Carole was reaching for the twin-drafts I had done before the ankle interfered with my brain cells. "This is most generous and could work. But my English papers are, well, I don't know how to say this."

"Speak the words."

"I already recognize your writing style; you write as you speak and that obviously works as you have been all 'A-graded' to this point. I on the other hand do not write as I speak; sentences form inside my mind but by the time on paper, often say or mean something different. And that has been my challenge; how to write less structured and more natural."

"And the two papers you hold in your hands?"

"At first I was slightly offended but as Moondog played and I read them, it occurred you were writing from *inside my head*; your sentences and

structuring are what I would have intended *before* it ended up on paper. Bobby Cooper you are perfectly reflecting my mind on paper! How in the world do you do that?"

"Help me please dear; this is bad, or is it OK?"

"Much better than good; from now on until forever and a day you write everything I need to have down on paper! Oh my, I *knew* you were the one" and she came out of her adjacent chair and with great caution onto my lap.

Several moist moments passed until her inadvertent body squirming began to cramp my leg muscles. I whispered into a nearby ear and with moist eyes she carefully removed herself to stand holding both my hands. "One more thing" as the back of a hand shifted to wipe damp cheeks. "Why do we need OJT visits weekly?"

"And that was to be my last suggestion. If they will bring us the work assignments for say the next month, we could reduce to half or less often how often they intrude our life. But there might be an issue with payment?"

Carole laughed and again wiped her cheeks. "Actually, I would pay them *not* to come here faster than for their visits! We'll get to that topic one day; it is on my list! But with John and Hilda dropping in, that is where I need to concentrate for the next week; perhaps longer. So do we offer to pay them for not coming when they are here or when they go back to school?"

"This is week-one; I suggest we go with the visits but sometime towards the end of the week you call and talk with the principal; or go visit him. I'm guessing each OJT has pre-spent in their mind the surprise extra income they have fallen into here, so perhaps that is a starting point for discussion?"

Carole settled anew onto my lap and the moist exchanges renewed. "Tomorrow, we'll work out how to get around that cast!"

Chapter Twenty-Three

Divide by three – multiply by three

The French class OJT visit went off without anxiety, except perhaps for the OJT-person. She was totally blown-away by The Hacienda although would actually see less than ten percent. Getting her back to French, and our suggestion 'next visit include' a full-month of lessons, would consume more than half of the hour. Carole thought the most affirmative approach would be to hand each an envelope with their \$50 payment at the end of a session. This 12th grader insisted she open it before us and 'gush'. The only meaningful response we heard was "I dig this; \$200 a month for three months!"

Dinner passed, George returned advising "she lives in Walnut Creek" which was his way to report getting her home in the 5PM traffic was going to take longer than we anticipated. He was not complaining, merely making certain we understood. We did.

Back in our bedroom, Carole first arranged my excessive quantity of pillows, sat down at my feet, and started to remove a file from the still open box. And she stopped.

"No, my Bobby; I believe we need to understand some things about John Senior, first." I smiled in affirmative; no words required.

"As you are aware, I was ten years, eight months, eight days when he died. From age 5 to past ten he was my father figure while Junior was flying off to wherever. Even before Junior adopted that lifestyle, I recall almost nothing about interaction with that man. I may have been seven, eight at the most, when Senior began to educate me on family finances. I remember my allowance was \$10 a month and any number greater than that was beyond my comprehension. Senior may have held a premonition; it would have been '45 when he purchased the two radio stations; I - like

you at that time - seven. So here he was in his office on the ground floor, surrounding me with every type of then-modern device as I sat on his lap in the swivel chair still there. One was a new push-button type of calculator, a prototype from his friends at Hewlett Packard. And he said to me one day, 'let me teach you about numbers'.

"I recall this as though it was yesterday, but obviously we are talking a half-life for me. And he proceeded to take a bag of wooden blocks from his desk, carefully stacking them up. The blocks had numbers - six sides each, 1 through 10. The first pile he called assets and the second debts. The first was much larger than the second.

"I asked him to explain these two, to me, new words; assets and debts. He did and I recall how clear it was at the end. Assets were good; debts were not. And then he shared with me 'the lesson I learned from my dad' - that being John-Original. He said, word for word, 'whatever you believe your assets might be, divide by three; whatever you believe your debts, multiply by three'. It was the John-Original three-rule of life. I tell you this to define when John Senior died on December 28, 1948, sitting before a television receiver enjoying San Francisco's first week of television broadcasting, in the weeks that followed attorneys who dealt with his trusts and bequeaths, after working with the family accounting firm, came to the conclusion his assets were valued at seventy million 1948 dollars. That number - seventy million - became the benchmark by which John Junior, Hilda, 'Her' and I have gone forward over the ensuing nearly five years.

"But larger than this, I recall how important it was to Senior I learn to operate that prototype HP calculator and from 1949 to today the annual trust funds available to me, and Her, around \$100,000 each year as I have previously shared with you, never added up properly in my mind. And as I have also told you, each year approximately half of my share of interest-on-interest has gone back into some sort of magic account maintained by the accounting firm; a girl needs only so much to get by and around \$50,000 each year has been excessive; witness my purchase of serial number 007 for the '53 Corvette!

Divide by three – multiply by three

“Six months before I met you, being here alone, I began digging through Senior’s long-neglected file cabinets trying to comprehend the annual statements from the name accounting firm. Do the numbers in your mind: \$100,000 a year, based upon 5% of 5% of real assets. The first 5% is the interest bearing amount, the second 5% is my share. So, if \$100,000 is ‘my share’, what is the *real* number?”

“Based upon a seventy million dollar estate the first 5% works out to \$3,500,000 annually; the second 5% of that equals \$175,000. So why has my 5% of 5% share hovered at \$100,000, not changing except by insignificant thousands, year to year? I was determined to understand this!

“Am I overloading you?”

“Not even overwhelming” I responded with a wide smile. “I love a mystery!”

“Excellent; it gets better quickly. There is only one other human being I have shared this conversation with; our Scotty. Over time after Senior had a stroke before the television with me on his lap, it would be Doctor Abraham Scott who gradually became my father confessor and advisor. I, you as well, are forever in his debt. That man could, but never would, ask me for a million dollars in cash tomorrow and I would respond ‘in small or large bills’? But that is an aside I felt obliged to share. Now, as it turns out, Senior had limited trust in the family accounting firm, that being the one who sends me checks each year for give or take a hundred-thou. In his long ignored files I discovered the divide-by rule at work. The seventy million trust value this crazy family circle around year to year? Multiply that in 1948 dollars by three; his *real* assets when he died were not seventy million but more like 215 million. And in the interim five years - well, I can but work through the numbers as I am now doing; it will not shock me to learn the alleged seventy million today is 300 million. You understood I was wealthy but how does that number - 300 million - strike you?”

Any number larger than a pre-Carole allowance of \$15 was beyond my focus; 70 million or 300? Neither computed in my middle-class Cooper brain cells and I said so. But her question did allow an opportunity to raise another issue.

"When you had me read Senior's will with the hand-printed amendment dealing with early marriages, I did not realize this added line should not have been a mystery to anyone. Why did Her and her MBA husband need to engage an outside attorney to reveal this?"

"Excellent; you are paying close attention! Everyone attending had a copy of the will. But *only* the discharging attorney had the hand-modified version and we were instructed to read our own copies; he did not read aloud anything beyond the first sentence of each section. And as he turned pages announcing each by number, we were reminded to 'read along on your copy'. So there on the official copy, the amendment; no place else and the session would end that way. Senior had died around twenty days prior and for the family but especially me, at age ten, it was all very nerve wracking.

"Her became engaged at 17 and her about-to-graduate MBA husband contacted the Caldecott family attorney for a full copy of Senior's will and the trust documents. The first clue I saw was immediately after their marriage the monthly Trust update suddenly listed not only Hilda and John but Suzanne as well as full beneficiaries; something not possible based upon my copy of the same papers, Her not yet being 20 years. It would turn out her fiancé's father used his attorney to request the documents. I naturally called to ask 'how can Suzanne now be a *full* beneficiary?' and we both know the answer to that one! Little perception is required to realize Suzanne's annual hundred thousand trust income for life had to be based upon something much larger than that number and whether it was the fiancé or his family that deduced this I can but guess."

Carole inhaled several deep breaths, smiled weakly, dabbing her cheeks. None of this was coming as easily as it sounded but we were advancing to the core of her worries and concerns. I would continue asking questions.

"Darling girl - about this divide by three rule and potentially 300 million estate value; who else knows this?"

"Most of this I have uncovered since the unexpected drop-in by John and Hilda. For example, today I learned *we* own a pair of newspapers - a total surprise to me and certainly not something which has contributed to

Divide by three – multiply by three

my 5% of 5% as far as I can determine. Answering your question, Scotty has been kept current for several years but is not with any of my recent discoveries. Beyond that, John and Hilda and Her continue believing they are living in a 1948 created seventy million dollar trust world. You and I have this updated knowledge, nobody else. Can you imagine their reaction if they did learn of the 'divide-by-three' Senior rule of life!"

"My quick math; Hilda and John's nine million investments in an Argentinean cattle ranch would consume around 13% of seventy but if your three hundred number is correct, more like three percent?"

"Exactly! And you know what? In a heart-beat I would grant them free use of the three percent just to be rid of them both. Oh my; they represent the sperm and egg of my being: am I a bad person for discharging them so easily?"

If I could have moved from the half-sitting, half-horizontal position I would have done so instantly. Carole needed a hug, a long hug, and the only way to deliver required she come to me. I asked and she did and the caressing extended for perhaps five minutes culminating with deep sobs against my chest.

There would be one more question for the night, conscious we had not in fact attacked the still half completed file container. With her head and shoulders on my upper torso, I asked.

"So what do you, we, do next? It seems there may be a substantial number of missing assets; a very large bag of number blocks."

Chapter Twenty-Four

A change of focus

Life during the last week in October 1953 was moving faster and faster. By Friday, following the History OJT visit, it was apparent there should be no more scheduled the following week; we simply needed to focus solely on the missing asset blocks. By late Wednesday, Scotty had arrived in time for dinner, following which the three of us would disappear into Senior's study. It would be a record-setting 11PM when the day completed.

Over dinner Carole delivered one of her spot-on sequential summaries explaining for Scotty, and me as a refresher course, what intensive digging into Senior's long-neglected file drawers seemed to be revealing.

"There were or are three different asset ledgers," she began; "only the full trust deed was shared with the family attorney and accountant. In theory, from his death until now, totally different lawyers and separate accountants have continued to operate - I hope! - additional groups of assets. It was the Senior adaptation of the John-Original approach to assets; *divide by three*."

"Three times 70 is 210; are you suggesting the sum of all parts is something like that number - with 6 more zeros suffixed?" Scotty's attack on Gracie's dinner had slowed down and ceased abruptly when Carole mentioned 'divide by three'.

"With some caution. In the initial 70 million trusts, various safeguards have been in place to ensure the investments are not mismanaged. What first piqued my interest were the individual non-trust assets which his will bequeathed to Her and I; the two radio stations for example. And the property on the Nevada side of Lake Tahoe to Her. They had been deliberately removed, left out, of the comprehensive trusts. And to

that add my ownership of the fifty acres on hilltop and its ham radio station, Senior's stamp and coin collections and so on. To apparently balance these individual allotments, only John Junior and Hilda gained immediate, although restricted, access to the actual seventy million estate with Her and I ultimately becoming full co-beneficiaries only at age 20; or so we thought until the one and only *official* version with the handwritten amendment surfaced.

"This moves us to two, and perhaps more, totally non-trust-registered asset groups. As the documents I have not been able to read until today reveal, Senior established some number of California corporations where he was the sole stockholder. And the corporations own - I say that in the present tense - various investments ranging from additional land beyond the family's 3,000-plus acres to the aforementioned newspapers, a couple of shopping centers, a pair of deep-sea salmon fishing vessels; the list grows longer with each new file I open and study."

Scotty now decided he had consumed enough food, taking a long swallow of hot tea just in by Gracie's hand delivery. "Carole, you have done a very thorough job; out of curiosity, approximately how much still remains to be studied in Senior's files?"

"I might be 75 percent done, but many of the files require reassessing even at this stage, because where one might for example detail two salmon fishing trawlers, another separate file adds a fish processing plant investment in Monterey. Senior had a special skill, well, many special skills; he saw something I term vertical integration as important. To illustrate, first the trawlers create the catch, then the Monterey plant converts this into a canned or fresh product for retail or wholesale marketing, and finally in one or more shopping centers he leased out, there would be a food or fish outlet where apparently one condition to being in the facility included retail sale of his salmon products. Is that clearly stated?"

"Brilliant!" was Scotty's response; I had earlier in the day, being the practice-on-me guy for her report, arrived at the same conclusion. "But now I am seriously nervous; firstly about how these investments through stock ownership have survived nearly five years with no Caldecott over-

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sight. And secondly, with John deceased, just who actually owns these non-trust assets?"

"Shall we adjourn to the Study?" my fiancée answered.

The working area tables and benches were deceptive in this room; if one emptied the clutter of perhaps ten year accumulation, few school classrooms would contain more bench- top space. George under Carole's direction had done just that - clearing the clutter into storage boxes - over two full days. And now replacing the clutter were carefully arranged files, many of them open to display the top sheet of what might in fact be dozens of individual pages. Using a variety of colored clips, Carole had several dozen files tagged for quick reference and locating.

Scotty was more than impressed with the effort and complimented his unofficial ward. She responded with a generous hug, verifying for me the two of them were essentially identical in height; something not previously registering.

"This folder answers your second question," handing it to our doctor. In fact, I had not been shown this one previously and Scotty carefully scanned six amber-colored printed sheets. He could see my obvious interest and passed the folder on, chair-bound as I would continue to be for perhaps another month.

"Bobby, hand it back to Scotty." I did so immediately, uncertain why.

"You read only the front of the stock certificates; the corporate name and charter, the Seal of the State of California, and the shares information. Now, turn them over, please."

He did this, and with some effort, sliding into a nearby chair briskly rubbing his forehead with the free hand.

"A fully completed stock transfer? Senior expected not just someone, but you in particular, to one day discover this treasure trove! In fact, if my sketchy comprehension of California law is correct, all you need do is record these share exchanges with the state and from that point on *you* are the owner of record for all of this?"

Carole was beaming as Scotty returned the file folder to me; I was being thrust into advanced stock transfers 101A and right there on the backside,

"I hereby transfer to Carole Ann Caldecott all shares of this instrument..." followed by twin signatures; one in totally illegible cursive and the second in the familiar printed block letters.

"Now, your first question and frankly the most perplexing. These certificates clearly have 1,000 shares in each solely in Senior's name; he owns 100 percent of these corporations. And in other folders we will inspect, you will see how two salmon trawlers, a Monterey processing plant and some fresh-fish shops all appear to be owned by a single corporation, along with some other investments. But in large, each stock certificate has a sort of flavor; the newspapers, a chain of retail book stores for example are owned or controlled by another single corporation. And," standing to reach for a separate folder, "this is one you may find amusing," handing it to Scotty.

He skimmed it at first, turning a page and then absorbing with greater care. His reaction was some distance from what I would describe as amusing.

"He - you! - own *my* medical building??"

Carole chose to ignore what I interpreted as indignation. "This one is unusual; in most cases the land where an investment rests, say a shopping center in San Jose, is owned by one corporation while the actual buildings which form the lease to tenants are held by another. I suspect he did it this way to gain leverage financing and to make it more difficult for someone to assume control of both with a single transaction. Yes, in the case of your building and the land where it rests, both are within a single entity."

Scotty's indignation was fleeting. "Then *here* we have proof of the continued viability of Senior's investment world, at least as far as my office is concerned. I distinctly recall how early '49 the annual rent was sharply increased and it has been climbing several percent each year since; they claim it simply matches inflation, but I never bought that. However, this tells me - us - somebody has been, is, operating this particular corporation. Which brings us to the most obvious question; if this generates a profit, where since late 1948 have the profits gone?"

Now Carole slid a chair between Scotty and mine, taking one hand from each of us, to make an observation. "As skilled as each of you may believe me to be, this one is a bit too large for one person; *any* one person, without

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regard to my age. Even Senior had professional outside help, which he hid successfully from the entire family; but for reasons I cannot yet explain, the law and accounting firms who have been operating these investments since 1948 are not my first choice to continue. Perhaps in the files still to be inspected and integrated into the mix, something will change my concerns about his. But in the very best case, somebody has had a free run with profits from businesses creating perhaps fifty million per year in cash flow; funds remaining after expenses. At the end of the trail here, I don't expect to find Boy Scouts!"

Chapter Twenty-Five

How to avoid years in court – in one complicated procedure

The evening did not end there, but my mind virtually stopped at this point. I would listen for another 70 minutes while Carole and Scotty discussed next-step tactics, both coming to agreement; “first the balance of the files must be dissected”. It would be a final exchange that did restart me.

“Scotty, you have been my mentor and while my tiny problems have never previously been of this magnitude, I am asking for help.”

“How, Carole?”

“I have identified most, perhaps all, of the legal and accounting firms who appear to be managing the unlisted assets. And only moments before you arrived, I located this file,” handing it to the doctor. “It contains monthly accounting information detailing profits being paid out of outstanding accounts to Senior. The last report is dated 30 November 1948.”

Scotty spent perhaps five minutes going backwards from the end-of-November statements for two years, month by month.

“I can see now where your ‘50 million dollars in cash flow’ number originates; based upon the end of 1948, and this being virtually five years later, that estimate could be quite modest.”

“Perhaps, but notice the rather large percentage attributed to the salmon enterprises, remembering salmon fishing is in the spring and early summer and by the end of say September that activity all but shuts down.”

“You are forcing me to go back to school again on a number of subjects I totally ignored while earning my MD degree at UC Berkeley!”

“No, I do not intend that. But there is no monthly profit and fund transfer statement past end of November 1948; assuming one had been prepared for end of December, and Senior died on the 28th of that month,

what sort of collusion would explain a total lack of similar statements after his death? Moreover, no opportunity yet to attempt verification of the accounts where apparently these profits landed; it will be at least tomorrow and I may not have enough persuasive power to get a telephone answer on that one."

"Perhaps they were mailed, even hand-delivered, and somehow here they were simply tossed out? Remember the turmoil that followed his death. "

"That is where I need your assistance; advice in fact, not much more. You have one or more lawyers and accountants as regular clients; yes?"

"I do."

"And as their doctor, you would over time form intuitions about each of those clients; their basic integrity, for example?"

"I routinely do that; it cannot be helped. That is why I elected to suggest your father, John Junior, and your mother, go to another physician; do I make myself clear?"

"I thought so! Alright, can you suggest high integrity, closed-mouth individuals - one each lawyer and accountant - to help us, me, unravel this?"

Several minutes of complete silence ensued. Carole initially stared at Scotty, next checking on my ability to carry-on with a gentle hand squeeze and a smile. She fully understood what she was asking.

"There might be one, even two of each here in the area; most of my clients live within a 15-minute drive of my office. But that occurs to me as asking far too much of anyone who lives here; if this final number keeps climbing, even the most virtuous attorney or accountant - assuming there is such a thing - would sooner or later reveal their new client. We don't have a great deal of social interplay in Contra Costa County - the founding family *plus* significant wealth would simply be too much to keep bottled up."

"Are you saying the risks to *Caldecott privacy* are too great?"

"I am - but wait - before you despair, young Carole! My two dearest friends while attending Berkley were graduate students like me; one in

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accounting, one in law. I nearly married the accountant-to-be and before you ask, she was indeed female!"

"And?"

"The accountant is married with family, practicing in Denver; a sole proprietorship. The lawyer lives in San Diego, but practices with a local name firm. The advantage to them would be they are not local and each would have my advance tutoring and then approval, if in fact they passed my - your - tests."

"I know this is self-evident," Carole responded, "money is first of all *the* issue here, but not as that may relate to whatever it costs to bring in an outside accountant and attorney. In other words, their fees are a blank check, but - and here I go putting pressure on you - Bobby and I will expect performance for payment. Is that too harsh?"

Scotty smiled; "Not at all Miss Caldecott; everything you have demonstrated to me, tonight or for years, tells me that!"

"Can you start tomorrow - I'd like to see the accountant first to verify what in blazes we have here and until we know that, as you suggested earlier, those stock certificates will simply go into a safe hidden in Bobby's and my bedroom.

That caught my attention, briefly; a *safe* in our bedroom?

The night would end, as Scotty departed using his own dedicated front gate opener remote control to gain exit. Carole and I watched the tail lights disappear, the gate lights switch off, and she said it all; again.

"Tomorrow is another day."

Indeed it would be, for tonight was not going to involve conjugal, nor likely would the next several.

Chapter Twenty-Six

'Her name is Hilda; his is John'

Thursday was a blur, with Carole going from our joint shower immediately to Senior's Study, skimping on breakfast and even lunch. My assignment was to fend for myself, which I did until bored beyond belief by concentrating on completing as much home-schoolwork as possible. Trying to retain a better attitude on the totally mindless effort, I set a goal; end of December done by the 10th of November. But in my heart I knew I should be in Senior's Study with Carole. She thought not, determined to devote every ounce of her concentration to completing the file search.

Carole and Scotty used the telephone to share thoughts several times that afternoon and over Thursday dinner Carole would update me; "Our doctor will be here for dinner again tomorrow night. And he wants you back to Kaiser for a progression x-ray either Saturday or Monday; can you arrange that over the telephone?" I could and would; Monday 11AM and to complete the assignment, George was alerted to the trip.

It would be our 9PM bedroom discussion in preparation for sleep that immediately drifted to newspaper headlines in my mind.

She began while gently sponging my forehead and neck with a warm washcloth. "Of all of the human names a parent could select, what do you suppose the odds would be of our ending up with an accountant named Hilda and an attorney named John?"

"Way out - that is superbly funny, but in a sick kind of way!"

Folding the washcloth to place on the bedside table, she cupped my chin in her hands and moved within six inches of my face; I anticipated a kiss.

"I do not jest, sir; Hilda McNamara and John Taylor. Last evening when Scotty agreed to try arranging their help, it briefly occurred to me he had mentioned no names. But on a scale of what was important at that point, it did not remain long. This will not be a problem, because each has an acceptable although seldom used middle name; Marie and Henry. One more thing before the lights go out; tomorrow, can you divert from school-work and assist by taking number columns and adding them up? I warn you, some number lists are several hundred long!"

Back in the game - however minor my assistance might be; "of course my wife-to-be!"

Friday passed better - much better - with me at least sharing the Study with my girl. Her focus was incredible, and I discovered she had the habit of asking herself questions and then answering them with barely a pause. The first time this happened I of course had no understanding of the question, but before being able to ask for it again, she was rolling on with a self-response. When you live essentially alone, lacking someone with whom to dialog, this actually made some sense, if a tad weird when first encountered. So it came as a complete surprise when one of her questions was *actually* directed at me. Caught unaware, I asked for "repeat please?"

"Sorry - asking about the salmon numbers; you did those first, yes?"

"I did and you want what total; for the fishing boats individually, the Monterey facility, or the wholesale and retail sales?"

"All the above covering the first 11 months of 1948."

I read out my totals as she jotted them down on a spread sheet.

"And the same for 12 months of '47?"

And this continued back to 1945, where Carole held up a hand suggesting a break in the sequence. "Bobby, there is something approaching a game-change in 1945; I noticed it when copying the monthly numbers for salmon, then the newspapers, plus book stores. And a mystery on top of that; why did Senior never place the two radio stations into the same corporation as the other media businesses? He purchased all in 1945, but held radio out as far as the records show, whereas up to that point he had been consistent with placing similar businesses under single corporate hold-

ings. I am not asking for an answer unless you have a crystal ball at your disposal!"

I did not.

"OK, how long before the leased facilities are totalled?"

It would be close to an hour if I went back further than 1945. "No, for now, just do the last four years ending with November '48."

And so the morning went; a short break for lunch that Gracie served in the Study on trays and around 4PM a loud "Hurrah!" from Carole broke the silence previously modulated only by the HP calculator's whirring and clunking.

I ceased number-crunching as her Highness came out of a chair, snuggling my head and shoulders from behind. "That was the last file for now; everything else unchecked appears to go back into the 30s and while someday we'll need to review it - 'Hurrah!' say I; a stopping place!"

"You summarized for Scotty - and I - being 75% through the files Wednesday night. In the last 25%, anything that sticks out differently from the first group?"

Her hands dropped, and pacing on the carpeted floor began; first from alcove opening to the cabinet where I had suspected a television set lurked, and then in a semi-circle around my chair. "It is bigger - the list of unknowns I mean, not necessarily the asset total at the end. I now have verification where the profits from each operation were going, at least the bank account name and number. My original guesstimate of fifty million in annual cash flow appears to be off by a factor of two to five; what I had not previously understood is the money each corporation put back into its own expansion and upkeep. Salmon fishing boats, for example, apparently require a completely new replacement diesel engine at the end of a season. I remember stories Senior told me how Salmon Chasers, as he called them, had to leave Monterey by late February and stay away until June or July, far up the Alaskan coastal waters. I don't recall his ever adding, 'oh by the way, I own some of those boats', but seeing \$400,000 engine replacement entries in the records brought back to mind his story. At the time I simply took it all in as one of granddad's tales."

"So fifty million in annual earnings from the full set of businesses each year is excessive?"

"Not that a ten-million number is small change, but please let's not get ahead of ourselves here; when Marie shows up, we'll have a much better handle on this. In the meantime, perhaps we need Henry's reading on how one determines what the activity of the bank accounts is today or has been since the end of November 1948."

"Your Family-Trust banker - different from where in '48 Senior's earnings were going?"

"Much more than different; it appears all of the pay-to-Senior accounts were located at one bank in Reno, or perhaps an affiliate in Carson City. Banking regulations since Roosevelt are pretty uniform in all 48 states but each has their own unique provisions affecting matters such as accessing accounts or payment of state income taxes. Nevada, compared to California, would be considered quite lax, a better place to do something if it was, shall we say, not down the centerline."

"May I see the file on the transfers to Senior?"

"Of course! This remains the crux of my biggest unknown; not just after November '48 but prior. Senior was deliberate with this step but the intent remains unknown."

My response: "Intent number one seems to have been to keep these corporations out of the family records - just for a start."

"I hear you, but in this file cabinet, where he obviously expected someone to look, there are dozens of pointers. And the fully prepared stock transfer certificates - they don't say Hilda and John Junior or Her on them. We will solve it, but for now happy browsing," handing me the profit transfer folders.

Carole returned to silence, no more self-asked questions, and I read, read again and then reread how profit funds from his various businesses were being moved on. The Reno and Carson City account information differed from one another; Reno contained a 12-digit number preceded by a hand scrawled 'R' while Carson City simply had 'CC0222', which did not appear to be an account number. Not that I had experience in such things;

my first-ever checking account had only been opened in Lafayette the week before Carole introduced herself and at that very moment less than \$200 resided there.

"Might 'CC' have more meaning than Carson City?" I asked breaking the silence.

"As in what?"

"Carole Caldecott, perhaps?"

"Surely a coincidence. Senior often addressed me Carole Ann so if he intended a double meaning, there should be an 'A' between the two. What else?"

"The Reno numbers appear to follow standard banking practice, given how little I yet know about that. But 'CC0222' seems either incomplete for an account number or perhaps it indicates something else?"

"Like what, pray tell?"

I struggled for an answer and finally gave it up. "I have no idea, but suppose you call the Carson City bank and ask what 'CC0222' might mean to them."

Carole glanced up at the grandfather clock, which in this case was in fact owned by John-Original. "Too late today; Monday?"

I would, could wait, but gnawing away in my mind was something - I knew not what - '0222' indicated.

"We just have time before Scotty arrives for a shower; ready?"

I was and as we now had the technique to prevent water from running down my leg into the cast's interior, the entire event could be conducted in almost real time.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

"Neither was anxious to participate until I explained the likely money involved"

Scotty deliberately avoided the subject until Gracie was preparing the mixed fruit dessert. He had related, with obvious relish, how at UC Graduate School John, Hilda and he had been an inseparable threesome. Carole's response was to urge he change a thirty-plus year habit and refer to each by their middle names, Henry and Marie, but the old names died hard.

"Hil-Marie was the toughest to convince, possibly because I began by explaining your age and then it went downhill fast, while further trying to elaborate about Bobby, and the April 20th wedding date. She has two daughters stair-stepped at 19 and 20 and when I tried to elaborate on your skills her reaction was 'I don't trust either daughter with \$20 a week!' Henry pointed out he could commute back and forth from San Diego to Oakland, which he explained 'means I can be home at night; at least some nights'. Marie asks that you call her on Saturday and here is her home number in some suburb of Denver. I know you can handle it Carole, but be aware, she remains suspicious this might all be my conniving to get the 'inseparable trio' back together one more time; kind of a mid-life crisis!"

Carole and I both laughed at length as Scotty dug into the dessert. "You scoundrel you!" was Carole's eventual response.

Dinner complete, we all thanked Gracie and it was while walking from dining alcove to The Study that Carole stopped abruptly in our wake. On my crutches I missed her first and turned to see her several feet behind. "Go ahead you two - I have something to do with Gracie and George and I'll join you." Which we did as Scotty, almost immediately less Carole, pressed me about the annual cash flow estimate of fifty million. Several minutes would

pass and Carole finally reappeared with a devious smile, which would not be explained until after our doctor departed. In the less-Carole interim, I suggested that estimate had slowly gone down over the two days since we last met but, "I personally believe it will end up around twenty rather than fifty." It was at this point Carole rejoined us.

For me the two-hour meeting was essentially a replay; I had been there most of Friday, in this room, crunching numbers and feeding the spreadsheets Carole now displayed for Scotty. An hour into the session it occurred to me she had not mentioned the two Nevada bank accounts; and in fact would not for the last hour as well. I didn't think it strange, just upon reflection an incomplete summary. Every 15 minutes or so, almost as if driven by an internal timer of some sort, she reached for my hand and stared into my face with a wink at the end. By hour-two I began to suspect she was trying to tell me something.

Scotty, just before leaving, asked about my ankle, reminding me the planned Monday x-rays would provide a status of the healing process. Perhaps to make me feel his concern, he inspected my protruding toes and pronounced them unimpaired. I was not certain what impaired would have indicated, but obviously it would be worse than his diagnosis.

By 9:30 his Buick tail lights disappeared behind a closing gate and we were alone. Carole instantly moved us to the first stairway tram-ride and off we went; she was bubbling and anxious to share something.

As I hobbled on crutches from tram number two down the long tile hallway she could contain herself no longer. "George knows the answer!" Lacking knowledge of *the question*, 'George knows the answer' was totally confusing. And I said so.

"George used to drive Senior - you knew that?" I did.

"So right after dinner it all came back to me; Senior and George would go off for one or on rare occasions two nights. I would have been at least seven when I first recall this, continuing until just before he died. In fact, the last time they did this was immediately following Thanksgiving in '48."

"Do I get Bingo for guessing where they went?"

Neither was anxious to participate until

"You do!"

"Nevada?"

"Reno and Carson City; George tells me they would go over the summit to Reno where he would take granddad first to the Reno bank, then drive south to Carson City to spend a night. George remembers in particular how in Carson City Senior always took a box of what George labels 'papers' inside. But he also remembers occasions when the papers were so heavy a bank employee came out to the car with a cart to carry it inside. Suddenly I think I know what was happening here!"

"I'm afraid I do not; tell me."

"Just a theory right now - but on Monday I'll try to get confirmation from the Carson City bank; Senior was hauling money, maybe even gold if that accounts for a box too heavy to carry by hand. The strange number for Carson City - CC0222 - I suspect it is a safe deposit box of some sort, not a bank account!"

We kissed, assumed the awkward positioning dictated by the oversized right leg, and within minutes I was nearly asleep. Not Carole; she suddenly bolted from me out of bed, exclaiming, "I have it; George was telling me something!" and whipping a thick cotton robe around her otherwise naked body announced, "I'll be back in a few minutes; George has something for me!"

The clock said she was gone nine minutes and whatever slumber I had been approaching disappeared; were it not for the heavy cast I would have been with her. The trip to Gracie and George's separate house went quite quickly. Or so I decided much later but those nine minutes seemed an eternity. 'George has something for me' ran over and over through my mind.

Carole arrived back in our room on something approaching a dead run holding in front of her a mid-size brown manila envelope with a small string clasp. "I started to open it and then said 'no - Bobby needs to share this'. Here, you undo the clasp!"

The envelope had more than paper inside; two lumps were apparent. The front was immediately recognized as Senior's block printing style:

'Miss Carole Ann Caldecott'

Resting on an elbow with the string undone, I turned the envelope to allow whatever was inside to fall onto the cotton bed cover. A brass key and a coin - gold in color - reacted to gravity, but the papers did not; with some effort they were extracted and all now lay on the bed.

"Read the papers to me!" Carole urged breathlessly.

In Senior's now familiar printing style, the first began:

'Granddaughter - you are reading this after my demise. The key contained here will open a safe deposit vault at the Carson City Wells Fargo Bank; number 0222. You will also need the entry numbers for the container and they follow: R22, L44, and R20. As I have no idea when you may be doing this, the contents are extra to my will's properties that are detailed there. Love and hugs to my favorite lap partner-your grandfather.'

I paused before starting on the second sheet; again in his printing style. I was baffled by the sudden reason she raced to George for this envelope, which until now nobody really suspected existed. Well, nobody but Carole. So I asked.

"When I left you and Scotty to ask George about trips to Nevada, he was forthright with me, but something still did not register. It was as if George was encouraging me to ask something - a special something. Then it hit me, here in bed; I needed to *ask* George 'Did John Senior leave something with you to give to me?' It was kind of like having the magic phrase in a fairy tale. So here they were watching television and I burst in asking just that. George immediately went to a small cabinet and handed me this envelope. He was following Senior's instructions right to the end; 'wait for Carole to ask for this!' I was close with my questions about their trips to Nevada, but not quite close enough. So the second piece of paper?"

"It relates to the gold coin in the envelope; says:

'This is a sample of what you will find in Carson City; while my Orinda coin collection is quite extensive, there were specimens so unique from the very

Neither was anxious to participate until

early California gold-rush days as to be almost beyond value; the enclosed Moffat & Co. 1849 Gold Ten D is one such example. Happy collecting! Your loving grandfather'."

Carole's response was totally anticipated; huge tears, long sobs, as she rotated in her fingers the one-side Liberty and second-side eagle coin. My own teenage-boy coin collection only went back to the 1909 Indian Head penny; this Ten D coin was struck before California was a state or had a government-operated mint. I could but guess the actual collector value she held between her fingers and my estimate would be well into five figures. To Carole, however, it was not any such value that struck home; rather it was the careful way her grandfather had selected *her* to be his heritage. Thirty minutes would pass before she finally fell asleep and for me, longer; 'This is a sample of what you will find in Carson City' played and replayed in my brain. 'Sample?'

Chapter Twenty-Eight

'Mrs McNamara? This is Carole Ann Caldecott in California'

The call, which Carole and I shared, did not begin well - me only listening - using an attachment created for Senior by a fellow ham.

"You can begin by explaining to me how a high school sophomore not yet sixteen is apparently in charge of a family estate which Scotty claims 'may exceed 300 million'."

And so Carole began, rapidly losing ground, because Hilda Marie was not satisfied with what she quickly labelled 'gross summaries'; "I deal in specific numbers capable of being tested by a variety of challenges and what I am hearing is at best a non-verified summary."

Carole now deduced nothing useful was going to conclude from an initial telephone conversation and moved to a new plan.

"Mrs McNamara, I am the legal owner of 29 California corporations, with an apparent value in excess of 200 million. My age is not, should not be, an issue here. In addition to those assets I hold personally, there is also a 25 percent share in a well-managed and documented 70 million dollar set of family trusts. My *personal* assets also include profitable radio stations, newspapers, shopping centers, several thousand acres of prime real estate - and that is only the beginning. Scotty recommended you to help me straighten out the convoluted inheritance where I routinely deal with six and seven figure numbers. This telephone call, any telephone conversation, will very probably not give you adequate information to satisfy your concerns. Therefore, here is my suggestion. With your office address and the banking details of any account you wish, by the end of the coming week air travel tickets will arrive in your office and ten thousand dollars, with

no strings attached, will appear in your bank account. Am I suggesting a suitable plan here?"

There was complete silence, save for some paper rustling, barely detectable and that only because the extra speaker connected to the Bell instrument had a powerful amplifier. And eventually Mrs McNamara resumed.

"You have my attention. Ten thousand will cover two weeks of my time but my CPA practice is especially busy right now as we approach year's end. Therefore, two consecutive weeks is simply not possible. Caldecott - the family name; I tried to do research from my office on who you or Caldecotts are and ran into an almost total lack of information. I did discover John Andrew Caldecott, born in 1876, died in 1948. And an apparent brother, Thomas Edward Caldecott, a couple of years his junior, died in 1951. Am I in the correct family tree here?"

Now it was Carole's turn to pause, using the back of her left hand to wipe away tears. "John was my grandfather and the source of my assets. And Thomas was his brother. As for a lack of researchable information on Caldecotts, we have always been a private family. And that also explains why, before you ask, I am talking to you in far-away Denver about this and not involving one of the many qualified CPAs right here in Contra Costa County."

Another long pause - no rustling of papers this time. "Alright Carole, I need some out-of-office time and this sounds like a good excuse to leave my staff to cope on their own; a test as it were. I'd say the week of November 8th to 13th. You are able to arrange my transport from San Francisco airport to your home, please?"

"Thank you, Mrs McNamara; yes of course and you will stay here at The Hacienda with us - a suggestion to gain maximum use of time and more importantly, all of the papers you will need to study are here."

"Agreed then; but no promises. If, after the initial week, this seems more like fantasy than real world, I return to Denver and that is the end of our association. Agreed?"

Carole did not hesitate. "Agreed, with one question."

"That is?"

'Mrs McNamara? This is Carole Ann Caldecott in California'

"Scotty is also recommending your prior tripartite member John Henry Taylor to conduct a parallel study of the legal questions; do you have any problem with that recommendation?"

For the first time Hilda Marie actually displayed mirth. "My dear, anyone who can insert the seldom-heard word 'tripartite' correctly into a sentence has my initial vote. John Taylor - I had almost forgotten Henry is his middle name - will in this case be my follow-up. Scotty explained your opinion 'first we have to understand the assets' and once we do, John Henry would be an excellent choice to untangle the legal web. So we have an agreement; yes?"

"Thank you Mrs McNamara; we do and until the 8th when you will be met at San Francisco, adieu."

"A most welcome interlude from my asset and debit lifestyle, Miss Caldecott. Adieu from Denver until the 8th."

Carole replaced the handset in the appropriate receptacle and reaching forward, switched off the speaker system. I expected her reaction to be 'whew - that was close!' and was wrong. Instead she leapt from her chair, landing softly on my adjacent lap, running fingers through my black hair while lavishing my forehead with moist kisses.

"Marie is perfect," she began; "exactly what we need here; someone to take control, throw out the unimportant cutting to the core of the problems, and, she has healthy scepticism. Questions?"

I had many, but one was basic. "I did not hear her bank transfer details or her office address for the tickets. Am I being too practical?"

"Not at all; Scotty already obtained those for me. And by the way, I give him - mark it - ten or fifteen minutes to call; I expect she is talking with him right now! So, let's head for the kitchen and Gracie's delayed breakfast."

Other questions had arisen in my head while I was a silent eavesdropper, the primary being 'Thomas Edward Caldecott?' while thumping my crutch-supported way searching memory cells; 'John-Senior's brother'? Little did I realize there was one more family secret buried so deeply here it was unlikely to be explained soon. But then life with Carole Ann was always a series of surprises - and seldom lacking in new knowledge.

My bride-to-be and I were barely seated when Gracie answered the kitchen telephone, shortly popping around the corner to announce, "Doctor Scott for you, Miss Carole." She smiled, swallowed her mouthful of cantaloupe, and reached for a nearby instrument.

"Scotty! You have been talking with Marie?" promptly descending into a wave of loud giggles as Scotty apparently attempted to elaborate on his conversation. His voice, although feet from my ears through the telephone earpiece, was animated with a level of excitement; if I could only catch the very occasional word, the level and tone was unmistakeable.

"Of course you will join us for dinner on the 8th!" Carole finally was able to respond. "Now, about sending a full copy of the Caldecott Family Trust papers and Senior's will down to John Henry Taylor; will you ask his instructions for a courier delivery? I see no reason why he should not at least be studying these in preparation to his own first visit."

And the tone from the earpiece resumed as Carole motioned to me for a pencil lying just out of reach from her ever-present yellow legal pad. Immediately she was jotting down both an address and set of San Diego telephone numbers. Then the sounds briefly ceased as Carole passed the telephone to me; "about x-rays on Monday".

The late breakfast completed, Carole began running through what she planned for us to accomplish during the remaining weekend time.

"This is Saturday October 31st," she announced as a preamble, "and we have eight days before Marie arrives. I already researched flights from Denver and will next arrange the tickets and delivery. It will be Monday before the \$10,000 fund transfer can be dealt with; banks being inconsiderate about being open on weekends. It will also be Monday before the Nevada banks can be contacted. Perhaps it would be best if you plan to go to Kaiser and the x-ray alone with George; I regret the timing here, but other than changing the Kaiser time there is no choice. And oh yes - while you are passing by Sunnybrook in each direction, how about stopping to see if you can locate your Camp Chenango memories? The sweaters and certificates and photos should be here, not there."

'Mrs McNamara? This is Carole Ann Caldecott in California'

Carole could switch from the most important to the most mundane, almost in the same sentence. Arranging for Marie, to retrieving my pre-Carole memories; amazing! thought I. "I can certainly try and George will be a big help carting the box or boxes away. With Britt and Babe at work, brother Ken in school, I should have plenty of time to search. Anything else while I am there?"

"Your ham radio license?"

"Of course; that had totally slipped my mind."

"And didn't you mention a couple of magazines you subscribed to; how about a copy of each so we can get the renewals going?"

"Done," I responded, not at all certain the Cooper-family after-move unpacking had progressed to the point where all of this could be located.

"One final item; a suitable photo of Babe and Britt, whether in a frame or not?"

That could be a challenge; while Britt was a photo hound and some place on the property there were 8mm Kodak movies dating back to my birth, I actually dared not broach that subject with Carole. If I did, 'better here than there' would have been my instruction and something about raiding my own parent's memories of me was not quite fitting correctly. I mused, could a 15-year-old be *kidnapped*, by another 15-year-old?

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Nevada? Now or later?

My return from Kaiser and 1016 Sunnybrook found Carole greeting me before the Woody's right front door was even open. Ignoring George, who immediately headed for the tailgate as we had arranged lugging two boxes of Bobby items into our bedroom, she began speaking at double-speed. In defence, after the door had been flung open without my assistance, I simply sat still and listened from the car seat.

"Accessing Reno's accounts - there could be more than one - is going to take John Henry and a court order. I ended up with the Wells Fargo branch general manager who slowly went from 'who the heck are you?' to 'Yes - I remember John Caldecott very fondly'. But his hands are tied by regulations, both his bank's and those imposed by the FDIC. Carson City on the other hand only requires us to hop in the Woody with George and show up! Once again, the GM was my ultimate answer. I'm required to show up with a copy of the Last Will and Testament, the Family Trusts, my US passport as I have no driver license, and of course the key and combination lock information. Get this! 'If you intend to remove the contents of 0222, be advised; this is not a standard metal tray box container. It began life as a miner's ore cart that rode on rails; I don't know your physical size, but I myself could easily fit inside with the top closed. The good news is the original rail wheels have been replaced with eight adjustable rotating devices.' And I asked what that really meant - all told, and his answer was 'the container weighs 300 pounds empty, but your grandfather had it so stuffed it easily weighs twice that now. You won't empty this into cardboard boxes!'" and Carole stopped to inhale.

My responses had to be instant to fit in. "A container that large filled with paper - that could weigh another 300 pounds; perhaps even more than the paper files you have spent your most recent life dissecting. Think of it as containing three times your body weight!"

"But you forget that 1849 Moffat and Co gold coin in the envelope. While you were gone - and how did it go by the way? - I did a quick study of the coin collection Senior left me. It is quite massive, thousands of pieces - but the gold content is not significant; mostly late 1800 and early 1900 minted stuff. Not to scoff at, but I can at least be optimistic about the sample and the written note he left in the envelope!"

By now struggling to exit the Woody, Carole reached to assist me in swinging my stiff leg to the ground and once both feet were planted, she opened the back-seat door for the twin sticks. This occupied her long enough for me to further respond.

"Located everything you suggested, including a couple of non-Chenango photo albums. When we lived in Ithaca one of my preoccupations was photography and while we left this all behind, there was a nice darkroom including enlarger. And..."

"Oh my - thank you! I have been agonizing what to do for your Christmas; now I know!"

Sticks in hand, trying to remember the balance of what I intended to say. "X-rays; they are in one of the boxes George has disappeared with. The tech person, who wanted me to understand she was not qualified to offer an opinion, did say 'your doctor should be pleased; there is healing taking place'. Did you know there were two splinters hiding around the fracture, which Scotty had to piece together like a jigsaw puzzle?"

Although I was standing and precariously balanced, this did not stop her from grasping me firmly in a bear hug. "I knew - or rather learned-it after Scotty was finished. They were the cause of all the blood loss; the extra time he had your leg open to reposition those two pieces. He explained this to me afterwards with the suggestion, 'one of those has Andrew's name on it; the other is Anita'." Returning the hug and maintaining a precarious half-balance was a struggle averted only by Carole's strong grasp of my

Nevada? Now or later?

waist as first one and then the remaining crutch slid off at awkward angles. Once again she was at the right place at the right time.

"Come on slow-sticks; we have Carson City to discuss!"

And so it began. 'Six days until Marie' and 'getting inside the safe deposit container' wafted back and forth for several hours. At home, there remained extensive prep work Carole insisted must be finished before our new Denver-based CPA arrived; and against that, the lure of the unknown contents in Carson City. 'Suppose we finish all of the prep work, Marie is here for a week, reaches various conclusions, issues her recommendations, and *then* we go to Carson City and discover things which, had we known before she arrived, might have changed every conclusion she reaches?'

My counter to all of this; "And consider if we go before her and there turns out to be several hundred pounds of additional file papers, all requiring time and study? Sure, we would bring it back here, but imagine how long it would take you to put them into order? It would totally disrupt Marie's visit; one set of 'study these' and another of 'we don't know - yet - but they may impact everything you're doing so don't get too connected to the first set!'"

"Then there is the time away element," Carole responded. "In the best case, subject to weather over Donner Pass, we'd be gone two very long days; in the worst, three days. And on my fingers I count only six nights until Marie appears," holding up a hand plus one finger.

"What is the weather over the next few days; do we know?"

She looked at me with a major question mark imprinted on her face. "Why? The pass?"

"No, the air; this is important enough to hire a plane to take you from Oakland or Walnut Creek direct to Carson City and back the same day."

"Interesting. But there is no way I would go alone; if we did this, it would be two of us, not one!"

"In your vast list of friends and acquaintances, who is a pilot and has a suitable two-engine craft? When I flew at a much younger age with Britt, lesson-one was never get into a single-engine plane for a potentially dangerous journey."

"You may find this difficult to accept; Carole Ann Caldecott has never, once, been in an airplane! And my heart runs into high-gear just considering crossing the Sierras during the winter storm season in even a two-engine craft. It is my sense of protecting the creation of Andrew and Anita that is speaking here."

In my mind this still sounded like a compromise solution; "Even if we return here with multiple hundreds of pounds of something; what then? Say we went tomorrow. And on Wednesday The Study or some other room is overflowing with the contents of 0222. That leaves four complete days to sift through - much less make sense of - the treasure trove before Marie appears. I'm not trying to be negative, only practical."

"My dear Bobby, it is a double-lose situation no matter what we do. If we wait until after Marie, and Carson City has important new information, Marie's visit may have been a wasted exercise. If we do go and discover so much material everything I have done to date is out of step with my earlier conclusions; her visit is still a mistake. Perhaps we let something or someone else make this decision for us?"

It would be an entirely new side to my future-bride requiring far more confidence in an ethereal world than I had ever considered in my own life. "Scotty?" I suggested.

"No, he's too close to the puzzle."

"Who then?"

"The 1849 Moffat and Company gold coin."

"Excuse me??"

"I'll be right back; don't move!"

Little chance of that with my crutches leaning against The Study's wall ten feet away. Her footsteps on the first set of stairs, then the second, and the faint sound of running down the third floor tiled hall echoed until it all repeated again, in reverse.

"Here; I have it!"

Indeed she did; an uncirculated, high value, virtually proof-grade coin that launched California into the gold mining business.

"And this helps us - how?"

Nevada? Now or later?

"Heads is Lady Liberty, tails is the eagle; I'll flip it and you call one or the other."

I was totally aghast. "You're allowing a flipped coin to determine whether we fly to Carson City? Surely you're not serious!"

"I have never been more serious in my life; actually that is almost true. When I said I would marry you *that* was more serious! Now, you call it; or, heads we go, tails we wait until after Marie's visit. Ready?"

Ten minutes later Carole was on the telephone talking with one of those special ham friends of Senior only she knew how to interpret from the Red-Name-Book kept in a Study drawer. We would depart Walnut Creek's aerodrome at 7:30 the next morning.

Chapter Thirty

"Where is my parachute?"

The good news was a several-day high pressure ridge had stagnated over northern California; the not so good information, imparted by the ham radio guy who happened to own several Beechcraft D18 twin-engine planes, was 'late afternoon build-up over the high ranges could make the return trip longer if we have to detour around them'. Carole gripped first one and then both of my hands as our pilot ran down the expectations. "All aboard!" was, he expected, a final instruction.

"Clem, sir?" she began. "Our parachutes?"

He initially took this as a bit of humor. Carole repeated the question.

"Miss Caldecott, first of all you will not need one. And if I am wrong and you did need one, the last thing you would be able to deal with is a 30-pound pack on your back while bailing out of this aircraft over the high Sierra."

"No parachutes?"

"No, not even for me and I devoted two years of my life married to one during WWII. Now additionally, this aircraft has two seats in the front; I am in one and I would normally extend an invitation to one of you to take the other - known in the trade as co-pilot's seat - but there is no way we could get Bobby into the forward compartment so Miss Caldecott; would you like to be my 'co' today?"

"A 'co' does what besides just sit there?"

"In this case nothing; it is simply a better view."

"And Bobby?"

"There are seats for six, plus cargo, at the rear on this craft. His stiff leg can take any one of those, but I'd advise he sit on the left side so the

right leg extends into the aisle; there are two seats per row with the aisle separating.”

“And while we are flying - in the air that is - would I be allowed to move from say the ‘co’ seat to the rear to see Bobby?”

“As long as we are not experiencing turbulence and I have the seat belt sign off, you are free to move around as you wish, but understand, getting into and out of the ‘co’ chair requires a small amount of physical dexterity because of the proximity of the various controls and devices up front; the things that fly this craft.”

Carole was considering all of these rules and after thirty seconds announced her decision. “I’ll start in the passenger section and if after we are - what is the phrase? - airborne? - if the turbulence allows, *perhaps* I will ask permission to come forward. There, did I say that correctly?”

“Perfectly. Now, again, all aboard; I will be last and I suggest you two not take the front row as Bobby’s leg needs the additional straight-ahead space to stick out into the aisle.”

Ninety minutes later, and Carole had not gone forward at that point, Clem announced landing at Carson City. Alighting from the plane at Carson Airport, helping me descend the fold-down stairway, she announced her verdict. “Bobby, from today, anytime we are travelling more than 100 miles from Orinda by car, we hire Clem! Or perhaps we should simply acquire one of these for ourselves!” A casual and brief conversation with Clem while preparing for the trip had revealed, “The new model D18S costs eighty thousand”. It would be a few hours before I connected the dots; *four* of the coins we would discover in Senior’s Carson City ore-car safety deposit storage area, at collector market value late in 1953, could purchase *one* D18S. This made it all seem so trivial; we would find hundreds, perhaps thousands of similar value coins sitting there in 19th century canvas bags bearing faded black ink imprinted labels of banks and firms decades gone from the business world. But it would not be the coins that would prove most fascinating.

If there had been an advance script to structure the visit with Wells Fargo Carson City, and fifty-something VP branch manager Kyle Moore,

"Where is my parachute?"

it could not have started more smoothly. First of all, it turned out he had been with the bank 'from '36' and that coincided with the year John Senior first appeared at their door. Secondly, by '38, the same year Carole and I were born, John had imbued Kyle with the spirit of ham radio and now post-war, he was delighted to learn John's granddaughter's fiancé shared his passion for the hobby.

"I've visited and operated W6HD a few times but not since John died," he began, which immediately brought Carole's face into a pucker, followed by moistness. She responded with the political thing; "You are invited to visit anytime as our house guest." Third Kyle, in effect, had become some sort of agent for John, perhaps earning a fee for his efforts - I did not initially ask and did not care - in locating various *gold trinkets*, as he termed them. Carson City was the site of a US Mint in the 1870s and the entire history of Wells Fargo Express and Banking Company had been built around that era. The ore-car safety deposit box was one of four - all sharing similar identification numbers from 0111 to 0444 - at the bank. Fourth, 0444 had been used as an interim storage location for gold trinkets; Moore's physical presence in the old mining community allowed him to locate these and when John Senior visited every month or two, Moore related how they would go through 0444 while Senior decided yes or no with the various new items stored there.

He told us all of this before we opened 0222 and had courteously excused himself while the top was lifted. Carole would ask him to return before 15 minutes passed, it now being apparent he knew virtually everything inside and probably handled each item one or more times personally.

"Your first challenge is what you do with it - today?" he began as Carole sat on the floor in the inspection room surrounded by dozens of canvas bags, largely unopened. The few we opened, as it would later turn out, typically contained precisely 100 or 200 gold coins and someone - perhaps Kyle, or John or both, had divided the bags by coin mint location and mint date. All of the 1850-dated were together, the smaller collection that predated 1850, but bore similar or identical mint marks to the single coin that brought us here initially, and then the first - but not last - total surprise;

gold nuggets, some the size of the end of my thumb, others barely recognizable as flakes. Kyle noticed our puzzlement as I opened and shared the content with Carole. "Each bag weighs within a few ounces of five pounds; I did say pounds although obviously gold has always been measured in ounces. So there are..." and Carole finished the statement for him, "...80 ounces give or take per bag." By the 21st century, when Andrew and Anita would have grandchildren, each bag could be quite dollar-impressive; at today's gold price it was merely a space taker in the ore container.

"I repeat," restarted Kyle; "what do you do with this today? And oh yes, over in 0444, I have all of the 1949 items collected for John, but stopped that activity when I somehow learned of his death by mid-year. Do you want to see those?"

It was now 11 according to the ancient but functional wall-mounted Wells Fargo clock visible through the iron security grate. Clem had urged we return to the airport not later than 3 for the trip home. That allowed us four hours to determine what was here, and then as Kyle was asking, decide 'what do we do with this *today*?'

Carole, as was her role in life, decided this was no time to not trust Kyle. "Sir," she began, "you know more about the contents here than we will be able to decipher in a month of study. Give me a 1953 estimate of value for all I see surrounding me on the floor and the much larger bulk still in the ore cart."

"With or without 0444?" he asked.

"Please, without. I'll try to focus on that separately since in fact it belongs to you, or the bank, or some third party and not my grandfather's estate - which means me."

"Quick sale or market sale? Let me explain: 'market sale' means the contents are advertised to collectors and bids taken and after maybe six months it is done. 'Quick sale' means someone swoops in and takes it all for what would be perhaps 80% of the market sale price, obviously intending to make a profit. So which number?"

"I can calculate quick from market; so market please."

"Give or take five, I'd say fifty-five."

"Million?"

"Where is my parachute?"

"Yes my dear; nothing here represents thousands and even the full assets of this bank do not reach billions."

Carole did not show *any* reaction, but my mind raced into complete overload; 55 million *dollars* sitting *here*, now owned by Carole? I completely overlooked - for the moment - the '*half* of what is mine is *yours* part'.

"I see. Now, without opening up 0444, how much would that be if added at market value and what were your arrangements with John Senior for payment?"

Kyle instantly realized he might have a customer here, although he paused just a few seconds too long for Carole.

"You said whatever is in 0444 was placed there in the first-half, or so, of '49. Surely this cannot be a significant number to have sat here so long after you learned of his death?" She was saying this to a man with a bank salary not far into five-digits per year and to whom John Senior's private transactions had more than trebled his annual income for the fortunate decade between 1938 and 1948. Kyle was not dishonest, but he was quick to react. John Senior was the best thing that ever happened to him; he, more than most who knew and depended upon the man, had never recovered from the death notice.

"There is around \$250,000 invested in it..." and he may have started to explain 'this was more than four years ago', but something inside him suggested he not wave any amber flags in front of John's granddaughter.

Carole did not hesitate. "Of all of the bags, opened or not opened, and now belonging to me - which one represents \$250,000?"

This, perhaps, was the point where my pre-Carole \$15 weekly family allowance mindset evaporated forever, *poof!* having just run my fingers through a bag of 100 golden coins with an average market value of perhaps \$10,000 each!

Kyle also did not hesitate, reaching into the ore cart security vessel. "This one."

"Open it please," responded Carole "and show me what is inside."

The bag was heavier than the others, obvious from the effort involved in lifting it from the cart. The knotted black ties came undone and he shifted the perhaps thirty-pound bag adjacent to her feet.

"Silver?" she began. "Comstock Silver Mine ingot bars?"

Up to this point, we had no idea the balance of bags in the cart were not simply *more gold*. As I would recall later in life, once you have run your fingers through a few thousand gold coins and nuggets, the initial thrill departed. It was simply hard and shiny.

"Yes, silver. And before you ask, these bars are production from The Comstock's first month of operation; each has date, weight and purity symbols. I say they represent \$250,000 because of their weight and antiquity. There are not many first-month original silver ingots in existence anymore - most were shipped out of here like this and ended up being melted down in a mint or someplace else."

"Kyle, I offer you this bag, which you value at \$250,000, in exchange for the contents of 0444; if that is acceptable, please transfer 0444 to 0222."

Kyle was suddenly on a mind-high; he never expected such a decision without belabored haggling. What he did not appreciate was Carole's determination to move on and get all of this out of Carson City in the fastest, most expedient, way possible.

"Kyle, when that is done could you arrange for a send-in lunch while Bobby and I discuss the next step?" She was purposefully dismissing him, but mentioned nothing about a need to leave the bank not later than 2:40.

"Of course, with pleasure; any special requests? We have a great Chinese restaurant..."

"No Chinese thank you; some sandwiches, fruit juice, and a green salad will be just fine. Oh yes, is there possibly a pick-up truck we could hire to take us back to the airport?"

"You mean with the contents here?"

"No decision yet; just determining one exists if that is how it works out."

"Miss Carole, driving from here to the airport with all of this piled into the bed of a pick-up truck might be a very bad mistake. Personally, I wouldn't move even one bag without an armed security truck."

"Like Brinks?"

"Good as any."

"Where is my parachute?"

"And how many people even know we are in here, or more important what we are doing here?"

Kyle paused. "Some of the bank staff, especially the older ones who remember John. Oh yes, my wife Joanne. Why do you ask?"

"Trying to appreciate the risk of an open pick-up truck carrying maybe 500 pounds of metal over a 15-minute trip to the airport. Alright, I have it assessed; before lunch, can you arrange the following? First, Brinks truck here by 2PM to carry this to the airport. Second, an armed Brinks guard to fly with us back to the San Francisco area on a private plane. Third, a second Brinks truck to meet us when we land and carry the contents on for approximately 45 minutes to a destination I will provide upon landing. If that is too much for a telephone conversation, ask the local Brinks' manager to come and see me here; not *in* here, but in the bank, in your office. Can you arrange this?"

"You're serious about all that?"

"I am serious and John Senior would have asked no less if he was here rather than me."

Kyle smiled, tipped his hand and disappeared through a pair of locked gates. This had been the longest silent period for me since our day began.

"Bobby, until Kyle mentioned people who know who we are and why we are here, it never occurred to me this might be both naive and dangerous. Have we bitten off too large a bite?"

"Do you realize *four* of these *coins*" holding up the pre-1850 golden coin bag "would purchase a brand new Beechcraft like the one we flew here?"

She smiled and stretched to contact my waiting fingers. "That brings it all home for me; thank you. Gracious; with what is here, we could fund a new Caldecott Tunnel; maybe two!"

"Before we get too far-out with a transport solution, a couple of questions?"

"Proceed my soon-to-be-husband."

"When the top was opened, a red accordion folding file came out and you glanced at it, and handed to me. While you were talking with Kyle, I've gone through the file; it is a bag-for-bag hand-printed by Senior inventory

of everything he placed or left here through his last visit on 1 December 1948. So in fact, while we do not have every single coin or item on a list, we know precisely the number of bags and the bag contents; for example, bag 43-14 which I suggest represents 1943 and the 14th week, contains quantity 100 1852 and '53 'United States Assay Office' ten, twenty and fifty-dollar gold coins. Some of the early entries in this time-sequential inventory have been crossed out; I interpret that to mean Senior removed that bag, perhaps to trade for something else. And this leads me to the first real question.

"All of this has been sitting here safely for nearly five years. Getting it back to Orinda has suddenly become more than a simple transport exercise and Kyle put his finger on the risk; fifty-five million dollars in metal hauled to a waiting D18?

"Brinks is a good suggestion, but consider what do we do with this on El Toyonal after returning? There are at least 200 separate bags here to be picked up, transported, handled, move again and so on. Our best defence is probably our age and appearance; who would for one-minute suspect a couple of teenage kids, one on crutches, were carting around something equal to the annual Contra Costa County budget?"

I had her full attention and out of experience I paused.

"Give me your alternative; you obviously have one in mind!"

"Plan one is leave it right here, perhaps hand-carrying just enough to make us giggle all the way back to Orinda. When we are home, a totally safe and secure storage room needs to be created; I don't fancy having it sitting in the Hacienda on a floor, very long!"

"That would certainly be less stressful. So how would we eventually get it to Orinda?"

"We engage Brinks or someone like them. They pick it up from here with us present, it goes off in a suitable vehicle with appropriate security personnel and a day later it shows up ready to be stored in the purpose-built facility. And think how much fun it will be telling all of this to Andrew and Anita as they grow up and we introduce them to Senior's storage vault!"

"Where is my parachute?"

There was activity headed our way; Kyle with a thirty-something man wearing a blue Brinks uniform; I pointed over Carole's shoulder at the approaching duo.

The Brinks fellow stopped and Kyle came to the iron-gated outer security fence. "Miss Caldecott; I have the Brinks' manager here and your lunch is being set out on a table in my office. Do you wish to come out?"

"Five minutes please, Kyle," and the loose bags sitting on the floor were quickly being returned to the ore cart with me physically unable to assist. Kyle lingered, watching, and Carole added, "I will close and relock this container and then we will be out." It would not have done to leave several million dollars lying on the floor of the vault while we attempted our lunches!

After introductions, with 'Mr Brinks' obviously fascinated first by Carole's apparent age and then my crutch-along accompaniment, we retired to the GM's office.

"You are asking to hire Brinks to do exactly what?" the uniformed man with a plastic name badge that simply read 'Randolph' began.

"Plan-B," Carole began. "We have decided not to transport the contents of my storage box today; it will stay here for perhaps weeks. But when we are ready for it in California, we will hire someone - like Brinks - to meet us here, load the approximately 500 pounds of family keepsakes into an armored vehicle, allowing the driver and a second attendant to carry it over the summit down Highway 50 to an address in Contra Costa County. We will be there waiting for the delivery. Is this anything out of the ordinary for you?"

Whatever Randolph's initial impression, her clearly enunciated request restarted his mindset. "No ma'am," he began. "That is the level of work we do every week here. But I might caution you about the cost of what you propose."

"Caution away!"

"Our policy is for a written proposal stating a fee, the terms, and if acceptable, a written contract with 50% at the time of contract signing, the balance on delivery of the *keepsakes*."

"Agreed, with one provision; I want an insurance policy against any loss or damage to the keepsakes while they are in your custody."

"Brinks has a standard self-insurance policy which will add perhaps 20% to the contract price. You will be required to declare a total-shipment value in advance, however, and there are some limitations."

"Explain limitations."

"Coverage for loss uses face value of numismatic items; paper money, coins for example; not their estimated market value as a collector's item. I mention this only because we are in a bank and as Kyle has briefly explained, a relative has left you with some sort of collection."

"So a ten dollar gold piece is worth ten dollars for insurance purposes; not whatever the current collector market price might be?"

"That's it."

Carole was not pleased with the answer. "Suppose I simply declared the full shipment to be valued at fifty million dollars without being specific of the contents?"

"Won't fly with Brinks, ma'am. Unless we individually inventoried every single item in the shipment, make a complete list and the shipper - you - signs off on the correctness at both the shipping point and the receiving point. I've done two of those in my ten years here; anything with physical counts beyond a couple of hundred could see us - you and us - spending a week here and in California doing the inventory."

Neither Carole nor I saw this being the answer we desired. As usual Carole had a 'get me past jail' move for the game.

"Randolph, this is my grandfather's business card; I have on the reverse added my name - Carole Ann Caldecott. Everything else is correct. Please prepare a quotation outlining a trip to western Contra Costa County from Carson City and you will hear from me; you do have a business card?"

"Yes ma'am," reaching into a shirt pocket and exchanging with Carole. "Thank you for the opportunity to serve you," and he turned and left.

"Kyle," she restarted "can you leave us for a few minutes?"

"Yes of course Carole - your lunch..."

Which is where I interjected; "Kyle, I noticed across the street as we came in a well-placed numismatic shop for coin collectors. Do you suppose they might have a 1953 issue of The Whitman Guide to coinage? And if

"Where is my parachute?"

possible, could someone here pop across and pick up a copy for us?" offering a twenty dollar bill from my wallet.

"Not necessary; there on my shelf to your right, several copies of that book; with my compliments! And I'll leave you here for a spell."

We were alone with food that neither tempted nor appealed. And we shared, more than a love for one another, serious concern about safely moving Senior's legacy from the 1860s ore cart in Nevada to a purpose-built storage facility in Orinda.

"Your opinion?" Carole began, delicately moving a gold-plated fork provided by the bank around in a mixture of days-old vegetable greens. Before I could fashion an answer she had given up on the salad with a terse, "I guess I shouldn't expect *fresh* from a town in the desert".

My chicken *salad* sandwich might have been edible if they had left out the salad portion; lettuce past wilt made it very unappetizing. At least the chilled bottle of juice seemed consumable.

"Nothing I heard seems appropriate. There are easily thousands of coins and a detailed and verified list of each coin on an inventory checklist approved by the shipper - us - and the transport company - them - twice, once at each end, seems like a bad idea to me; not to speak of gold nuggets and flakes."

"I agree and we therefore have a 500-pound problem! It might be simpler to purchase the container with Senior's keepsakes from Wells Fargo, hire a drayage truck and simply roll it out of here onto the truck and then deliver it to Orinda. But I am not discounting what we do with it there as a concern; first we return home and immediately create a safe storage bunker. Now, tell me about the book on the shelf behind you."

"The accordion-file list or inventory Senior did - it tells us the type of coin, the year or years represented and usually the quantity per bag. That book will relate market price to collectors for these coins, subject to something we will never be able to verify until *each* and every coin is hand-inspected in Orinda."

"And that gets us where?"

"A more validated number than Kyle's 'fifty-five million'. But it will only be an estimate, because the true value of each coin, to a collector,

depends upon verification that a 1852 vintage coin of a certain mint value - say \$10 - is correct as listed by Senior, and then the most important item - *grading*. That he has bag-grouped coins by mint origin and date is not a positive sign these coins are in fact rated at what is known as uncirculated; the term means they have been individually stored without rubbing or knocking against other coins from the time of their initial issue until now. Just the bag storage probably destroys that even if in fact the coin went from the mint to Senior's bag without any intermediate stops."

"I have it; the book, and the inventory and ... how long will it take you to come up with a range of values?"

"Back home with the HP calculator - perhaps six to eight hours."

"What is the lowest collector-rated value called?"

"F-12; that means the coin has been around in people's pockets, banks, slot machines or wherever long enough to show wear and tear."

"And the best is uncirculated?"

"Not quite, although it would be the highest grade I would expect here; perhaps that 1849 Moffat and Company from Senior's envelope approaches this level. There is one above that called 'mint', which means with advance planning when a coin was created somebody carefully removed it from the press and stored it in a paper container; not even finger prints. Those are struck especially for mint records or avid collectors and most coins never had a mint-grade run."

"OK - I understand it. Let me reach for the 1953 guide over your shoulder; there, it goes home with us. Now we are left with the original big decision; 500 or so pounds of metal 250 road miles from home!"

"There is a rainbow here beyond the obvious one."

"It is?"

"Aside from the inventory list, I did not see one piece of paper in the ore box; your days of exploring obscure files won't restart because of our visit here!"

In plain view of unusually curious bank employees, Carole rewarded me with a significant hug and lingering kiss. It was probably entertaining to the locals, who did not yet have their own television service functional.

Chapter Thirty-One

"Plan C – for Carson City"

We would be back with Clem at the Carson airport before 2, there being no reason to linger in the aging bank vault. Kyle personally drove us to the waiting plane and this was Carole's final opportunity to focus on a plan; one she had not yet shared with me and certainly did not want Kyle speculating about.

"Kyle - could we purchase the ore cart and move it intact without becoming involved with several hundred cloth bags inside?"

"Suppose I just loaned it to you long enough to transport your keepsakes and then you sent it back? That would be significantly less cumbersome for me than going through several channels to obtain permission to sell it."

"That could work. Now, if it was rolled out of the vault, what are the options for placing it in a vehicle; say a Brinks truck?"

"There is the front, through the lobby, and, a service entrance at the rear; I suggest the last one because the alleyway is lightly used and you'd not attract the attention of rolling out the front onto Carson Street. I think I see where you're going; fascinating!"

"Finally, you were uniquely placed here to do what you did for my grandfather. But that was almost five years ago. Would it be possible for you to restart your enterprise and continue locating gold trinkets except now for Bobby and me, rather than John Senior"?

If smiles were coin graded, Kyle's now approached mint-quality. "Oh yes Carole; nothing would give me greater pleasure! Can I fax you lists at home? Tell me how to stay in touch! Nearly each week someone wanders in with a handful of 19th century gold or silver and a personal need for more

than face value. In some years with John we jointly uncovered several million dollars in metal pieces and ..."

"Kyle, grandfather understood this activity and I do not. We'll start off while Bobby and I attempt to become educated. For now and until we have 0222 safely home to Orinda, you begin your *prospecting* and we'll return from time to time to *assay* what you've stored in 0444."

And so we were off with one minor diversion; Clem had located a World War Two parachute in our absence and with totally humorous intent presented it to Carole as she boarded the D18. Being Carole, she instantly knew it was in jest and not a serious safety device; we all laughed for several moments. Still, the chute package was carefully laid by Carole in the seat before her for the trip home. 'Better she than me' thought I, doing my best, without success, to imagine how someone crutch-dependent would even get out of an airplane under stress.

D18 seats, immediately adjacent to the wings and twin 285-horsepower Jacobs's engines, are not conducive to conversation; Carole for future flights would equip both of us with earplugs. So 'giggling all the way home' did not occur; with the drone of the engines she actually fell into a light slumber, while I attempted to compare the Whitman coin book annual with the Senior logging pages. We had ended up stuffing three canvas or cloth bags - there were both - into a tote 'just for giggles' after she shot three Polaroids of me and the ore cart. "These will help us work out the transport space required," she added as we left the bank for the airport. It should all become clearer at home on Wednesday. After placing a tick mark next to the Senior log sheet entries for the trio of bags we were returning to Orinda, my focus was on identifying specific years, mints or coin-casting facilities against accordion-file lists. A D18 was not intended for serious concentration, and all of this would have to await Orinda's Study.

Ever-patient George, alerted by radio through an airport tower as we flew over Stockton, was waiting as we thanked Clem profusely for his time and effort. Did I realize Carole was already considering an investment with the man that would lead to the eventual creation of a new commuter-class airline in California? I did not.

"Plan C – for Carson City"

"Did I see you writing the measurements of the ore cart down in Carson City?" she confirmed with me as we left the Walnut Creek facility that labelled itself an airport. She had and I admitted this.

"With an ink pen on your cast?" she asked with a wicked smile.

"I couldn't locate a piece of paper at that instant!" was my excuse. She found it terribly funny. "Your leg cast is now valued at someplace up to fifty-five million," she retorted. No, life with Carole Ann Caldecott-Cooper was never going to be... .

Both of us were far more stress-tired than either cared to admit; dinner was mostly quiet, Gracie checking on us frequently, uncertain where the usual chatter had gone, and at the end Carole suggested - urged in fact - "tonight is a safe night; a shower and early to bed? I believe I have getting around that cast worked out in my mind."

It would be an unexpected end to a day we would both recount frequently in our future 60+ years together.

Wednesday morning was different when we both awoke; Carole lingered, not her usual hopping out of bed with a taunt 'last one makes the bed' which was quite pointless because my body moved only with assistance and the now abominable crutches; three more weeks to go? I dared hope!

Meaningful conversation after awaking in bed was a new experience. "Here's how I see things," she began. She had me at a distinct disadvantage; Carole awoke at full speed and it required a shower for me to even remember my name.

"I have at least two full days of Marie prep to finish, but now I can dismiss the threat of more papers from Carson City. You have maybe six to eight hours of cataloging our ore box asset; I'll provide spread sheets and using the HP; you work out both the lowest F-12 category value and the highest shy of uncirculated against the list. When you have the numbers filled in and tallied, we'll discuss the next step. That reminds me; if we are going to arrange construction of a suitable safe-vault area, tell me what your dream darkroom requires. The little I understand about photography suggests you need fresh water, sinks, plenty of bench space; what else? If we

are going to be overrun by construction people for a few weeks, we might as well do it all at the same time.”

“Am I allowed to wake up first before thinking about a darkroom?”

“You are. Say, I had a crazy dream last night - I know you don’t recall any of yours - but mine involved both of us with Andrew and Anita as we were swimming in a heated indoor pool. Is that some sort of message to me? I’ve never really been exposed to swimming, living here in a semi-desert; should we talk about this - an indoor swimming pool for the children?”

By midday and our lunch break, which we took in the kitchen alcove to avoid mixing food and papers, Carole initiated a new subject, which would evolve over the next few weeks.

“School? We opted out of OJTs this week, but next week Marie will be here. Stopping at four each afternoon to meet with someone to discuss our course work will be another element to deal with. Comment?”

“The good news is I have everything done through early December, but you need to copy over the work books to your own and proofread the Lit papers I’ve done past next week; that one you completed. Yes, OJT interruptions will interfere with Marie being here; knowing you as I do, we will start early, work late, probably pushing Marie in an endurance test. She said something about ‘getting a week out of the world of debits and assets’; she may reconsider that statement by say a week from today!”

“My question is broader than next week. California law requires we both attend some sort of approved schooling system until we are sixteen and after that point, continuing with school is optional. I have a plan about this, backed by strong logic, but once we are into January, Acalanes expects us to return. Frankly, from January, nearly four months of additional Acalanes until mid-April, seems like a bad use of our time and resources. Think about that one, please!”

“Continue with the OJT arrangement? With my ankle healed, under what pretext?”

“Be creative - think outside the system. That is why I mention this now; two minds are an improvement over one!”

Perhaps, unless *one* of the minds belonged to Carole Ann Caldecott.

"Plan C – for Carson City"

"I shall do just that my dear. Now, about the ore box numbers?"

"What so far?"

"There is no reason to doubt Senior's logging entries but even at F-12 value levels, this is turning out to be more difficult than I anticipated."

"In what way or ways?"

"Start with the silver items; the Whitman book does not cover ingot bars, just minted coins. And the only vague idea we have for silver ingots comes from Kyle's description of value for the six Comstock Mine bars we swapped with him yesterday. Then there is the gold nugget and flake bags; more than a dozen so far and again we have to rely on Kyle's statement; each contains approximately five pounds of product; over 60 pounds of gold total. The true value of *each* flake and nugget will eventually require a qualified assayer to determine the purity of each piece; two identical weight flakes, for example, might assay over a range of 3 or 4 to one based upon the purity of the gold therein. Thus, one five-pound bag might be worth - just a number - \$10,000 on today's spot gold market while another could be half or twice that. And I've made up \$10,000 as an illustration, having no verified way to create a real number."

"This says we will not have even a rough idea of the market value of the ore cart contents until first we have it all here, and second, someone comes with the appropriate skills and equipment to laboriously go through at least the gold bag contents?"

"It says that and more; remember the grading of *each* coin. One hundred of a certain mint and age cannot be valued without *individual* coin inspection. Just one example from memory: an 1853 United States Assay Office Twenty D in F-12, according to Whitman, would have a fair market price of \$4,000 but the same coin in EF-40 or extra fine condition would command \$12,000; a three-to-one change. So..."

Her hand was raised, a hold-over from Acalanes; I stopped talking.

"Then what you are doing today if we consider all coins to be F-12, all gold to be equal to the spot price found in today's Chronicle, and all silver to be based upon Kyle's statement - all of this will not be much more than a first-level approximation?"

"Unfortunately, that is where we are here."

"I'd like you to complete the inventory calculations nonetheless. And consider this; whatever the ultimate value may be, it won't change except over time as these antiquities grow older - becoming more valuable each year. There are no tax or other issues here, no inheritance transfer concerns. And whether we know the actual market value of the collection today, next year or if it awaits a project by Andrew when he is sixteen really matters-not. Whatever the *approximate* number today, or real number later on, what does it really mean? The ore cart contents will remain locked up in the new safety vault and there it will stay, less only the ore cart. And over time, if Kyle remains any good at this business, it will slowly become larger. John Senior was an advocate of what he called hard currency, which he intended to mean hard as in *hard metals*; he was *not* an advocate of paper money."

"Well, there are around 500 pounds of *hard* coming our way!"

"And as we are on the subject of coinage?"

"Yes?"

"Your own coin collection; tell me about it."

"Not much to tell, especially considering Carson City! I began at age ten using earnings from my newspaper route and by eleven or so would routinely arrange to get twenty dollars in paper-wrapped coins from the bank a couple of times each month. Then I'd go through searching for coins and dates which had not already been found and placed in my blue Whitman collection books. Being young and learning, I in fact purchased each year the annual version of the Whitman Guide and if Babe did not toss them when leaving Ithaca, they will be someplace in boxes at Sunnybrook."

"Your collection?"

"I saw that one coming! When George and I stopped there Monday, looking for the ten or so collection books was on my mental list. Did not find them and we may be forced to ask Babe for help here."

"That explains your quick study on the subject; you didn't start at zero when Kyle gifted us with the 1953 Whitman."

"Actually no, but the largest coin I collected was the fifty-cent piece; when one depended upon the earnings from a six-day-a-week paper route,

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well, gold coins appearing in Whitman were far-away objects to fantasize about. I had a rather heart-stopping moment yesterday in Carson running my fingers through hundreds and hundreds of those to-me dream-about coins!"

Lunch over and back to the grind. Sitting down in my work spot, Carole moved behind me after placing the crutches in their assigned location, throwing both arms around my shoulders, nuzzling my head with her nose and lips. Never one to miss a detail; "Haircut; I'll arrange for someone to come here before Marie shows up. Actually - now I think about it, Gracie used to trim Senior's hair; a much better plan!"

"A final thought before we resume?"

"Yes?"

"Alan Freed on KWBR; status report?"

"Oops! I was supposed to call Stan today to check on the progress with the first regular week's airtime, a sponsor, and if he decided to schedule it twice a week - tonight might be the first. Thank you!" and she opened the Bell instrument storage door.

By 4 Carole had worn her body if not mind to a nub. With perhaps eighty separate, color-clip coded files open on the expanse of tables and benches, following a constantly maturing master plan carried only in her head this effort was directed at creating a time-sequential gigantic show-and-tell, which Marie could follow with Carole as tour guide. Perhaps 15 minutes prior to her, "That is it for now; I need a diversion," exclamation, my assignment had also come to a halt and not wishing to interrupt her concentration, I simply sat pretending to review the columns and numbers, which by now could virtually be recited in rote memory.

"Diversion?" I asked with the anticipation of a much in love fiancé.

"*Casablanca*; suppose we trot down to the Screening Room and you teach me how to thread the projector? I feel a Bogie moment coming on."

Not what I had in mind of course, but close-time in theatre-comfort seats and fresh popcorn was not to be ignored. "One thing first; the ore box totals?"

"Oh my darling Bobby; there you have been number-crunching all day and am I to assume you have it finished?"

Opening the multiple pages of spreadsheets for review she quickly stood behind me with two hands rubbing my shoulders.

"Go for it."

"The total first - with conditions of course. Using the worst case F-12 coin values, the average gold-ounce pricing straight out of today's Chronicle, and an absolutely random guess about silver ingots - there it is," pointing to a single number on the bottom of the fourth sheet.

"Forty-nine million, six hundred seventeen thousand and change?"

"Yes - worst case I believe."

"So perhaps Kyle's fifty-five million is very close to a *real* number after all?"

"As you recounted earlier, we may never know and as the values go up and down, but mostly up each year; even Andrew and Anita may never have a real number. Think of this as a well hidden treasure chest the family retains for a rainy day."

Carole's sharp eyes began to notice, as she was flipping through each of my transfer sheets, some entries with no 'approximate valuation numbers' added by me. "And these?" pointing at two lines.

"There are seven mystery bags; some have names, but the content is either unclear or perhaps clear although beyond me sitting here to value."

"Wait a minute - this one is easily read: '202 carat blue-white'. Blue-white and carat? That speaks of a totally different category of hard currency; to me that suggests diamonds!"

From the first brokered Acalanes patio lunch with this young lady, my mind had been on a fast learning curve. This process had hardly begun. "OK - that explains something I did not understand. 202 carats relates to the size of either a stone or many stones; yes?"

"That's how I understand jeweller talk. Blue-white does tickle some memory cells; granddad used the phrase, not necessarily for diamonds, to describe anything he felt had special top-line value. He'd say, for example,

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'That's a blue-white investment opportunity'. So perhaps that explains this line; now this one?" pointing to the very next entry line.

"Actually, we can both read what it says: '2 pounds semiprecious gemstones'. What does that mean to you?"

"Not much, except Hilda would have nothing to do with 'semiprecious' - I overheard her lecturing Suzanne about 'accepting *only* precious stones' from her soon-to-be in-laws. So let's assume these are not more diamonds for the moment. You said there are seven non-identifiable bags?"

"Yes, four are simply numbers with no explanation of content. The last is someplace approaching amusing or perhaps something he won in a poker game."

"May I?"

"Here; read Senior's notes aloud."

Carole squinted; the words in this line seemed to be all in lower case but still the now- familiar print style lettering:

"46-XXX partial set male buffalo teeth".

Through heavy laughter she summarized for the afternoon; "Oh my - I have always imagined a genuine Buffalo Tooth necklace! Remember my birthday is coming in April - strung on a golden cord please!"

Doctor Scott, 'Scotty', would be updated on this new 'Family' knowledge before the day concluded; he was after all our 'senior compliment'.

Chapter Thirty-Two

Family secrets

Any expectation Carole would be totally unwound following dinner rapidly dissipated as we breached the second spiral stairway and headed for our room; it was barely 7:30 and that alone should have been a flag to me.

Sitting me down on my side of our oversized bed, positioning four gargantuan pillows behind and around my propped-up body, she bent down to lift the still unfinished box of file folders back to the foot of the bed. I should have seen it coming. *Diversion* to Carole did not necessarily mean something fun - although Casablanca had approached fun. She next assisted me, removing the special-order trousers with a double-in-size right leg, handed me a stay-warm shirt to replace my daytime button-up version, and as I struggled to pull it on she stripped to nothing but immediately recovered with her salmon-colored thick cotton robe. It would over the years become a measure of her at-this-instant attitude-to-life as to which of her more than two dozen robes she would select to wear. Salmon would eventually prove to indicate good-mood but mind-tired.

"With Marie arriving after four more sleeps, you and I really need to be on the same chapter and verse of the Caldecott quadrangle," she began. "She sounds like a sceptic, not quite certain this isn't some sort of *Kukla, Fran and Ollie* puppet show we live in here, and while I know when and where to hold the free-flow of information line, you will be subject to prying when you are alone with her. I do not intend to alarm, but you and I are a *private* family and there are some areas where no outsider may tread. Am I loud and clear?"

"That means I need to know what topics are forbidden when she asks questions."

"Precisely my dear. She is our employee and before we are completed with this era of our lives, Marie McNamara will either help us chart a clear course to complete separation of you and me from the balance of the Caldecotts, or, my plan to do so will fail. We have the future of our lives together, plus Andrew and Anita, riding on this; not to make too strong a point here or put you into stress."

"Don't forget - I love a mystery!"

"Good - except in this one we are the creators of the mystique, not the readers or consumers of the storyline. Now - moving on.

"The Caldecotts have remained private, kept to ourselves and stayed out of the public light, with one exception; his name was Thomas Edward and he was my great uncle; John Senior's younger brother. Thomas and John Senior divided John-Original's land holdings more or less equally; or at least that was their intention. I do not suspect either one sought to gain an advantage, financial, legal or otherwise, on the other. John-Original's will was quite a simple affair - a copy is here - and it covered nearly 10,000 modern-day acres, which began on this side of the Orinda or Berkeley Hills, ran over the top, and down into what is now partially inside Oakland, partially in Berkeley, partially in Piedmont. Senior and Thomas were left to make their own division, which they did more or less, using the ridge-top - what is today called Grizzly Peak Boulevard - with Thomas receiving the western side, John the eastern. In 1906, when Original died, that probably seemed like a fair settlement, because with the exception of the groundwork for what would turn into today's UC Berkeley, both sides were primarily barren agricultural grazing land even if in the end Senior's 3,000 acres did not equal in size Thomas's 7,000.

"Are you with me so far?"

"One question; 1906?"

"Good historical clue my husband-to-be! Original died in the San Francisco earthquake; April 18, 1906; just close enough to our birthday to make it a solemn date for us. 'Original' was a poster-boy for the pioneer gold-strike settlers; not literally, of course, but he was a gambler, an entrepreneur, a hard-drinking man of the west before California became a state.

Family secrets

Our Caldecott heritage, as original settler, is undisputed. Unfortunately, he left almost no traceable trail beyond his assets; there is but one rather fantasy mention of his name in any of the old 'Frisco newspapers; he largely stayed in the background, but diligently expanded his holdings. You and I are here tonight because of him and we should never forget that fact.

"Moving on; as the 1890s progressed, it would be the west side that became suburban initially and the reason was obvious; just look out the window to our west and what you see is straight uphill. Those hills were a barrier to this section of California and in fact as early as 1860 someone was urging the creation of a tunnel to allow more immediate access to what is now The Lafayette Valley. Where we attend school, Acalanes? It was a tomato farm when Roosevelt's corps built the school in 1940; until that point, virtually nobody between Orinda and Walnut Creek attended school beyond 8th grade.

"But I am diverted - I mean this to be focused and it is so easy to get off on a side-leg, my apology. In 1903, using an agreement from Original, the first tunnel was created; it was a shortcut between Berkeley and what is now Orinda, but not much of one. It would be 1929 before the present twin tunnels were commissioned, a much better and lower location, which actually connected useful points between Oakland and Orinda. The project, twin tunnels we use today, was completed in 1937.

"Okay. Thomas Edward was Mayor of Berkeley from 1930 to 1932. He was next a member of the Alameda County Board of Supervisors for twelve years and during this period also in charge of the project to build the tunnels. Now the 'we don't discuss it' part. The land on both the east and west ends of the tunnel was owned by Senior and Thomas; and in theory the mineral rights, which extend forever downward below land ownership, would include the tunnels themselves. In effect, the Caldecotts directly or indirectly owned the tunnels. That the tunnels would, at the conclusion of construction, be named *The Caldecott Tunnel*, but which was in recognition of Thomas, not John-Senior's donation of access on the surface point, never set well with my grandfather. And before you ask, Thomas died in 1951 - a point Marie mentioned on the telephone.

"Sometime after 1932 - I cannot locate a precise month or even year - Thomas and John Senior *stopped* being brothers. Senior had agreed to donate the land and whatever rights might be involved in the east end of the proposed tunnel to the project and he had good economic reason to do so. Completion of the twin tunnels would make this entire valley area significantly more accessible to the growing suburban population and thus his land holdings here would escalate in value. It was a *logical decision* as they say.

"Thomas was a public figure, Senior was private. Now that he is dead and I am more mature, I can reflect on the limited discussions about Thomas; there was a level of animosity there still not comprehended. I do not hesitate, as I did to Britt, pointing out The Caldecott Tunnel and our family name is more than coincidence. But beyond that, no discussion; the Caldecotts are a private family. Any questions on that one?"

"None. Actually, one; did Thomas have children who would be your - *our* - cousins?"

"Yes, he did and no we are not going there tonight. I am one who believes ideally the gene pool makes a practice of skipping generations; that means my strong points are inherited directly from Senior, his came from a great-grandfather I cannot identify. I choose to ignore my maternal side totally; Hilda's contribution to me isn't even worth discussing, although Her may have picked up some of that gene pool! At any rate, there are four cousins, only two of whom I have actually met and talked with and someday - *perhaps* - we'll investigate who and what they are. Fair enough?"

"Fair enough. Babe's family is a bit the same way; an enigma wrapped in an enigma. The Coopers and Britts on the other hand are an open book; I believe you once commented on this?"

"Yes, my initial research indicated Britt was traceable to The Mayflower, but then I learned there are now around a half-million of these descendents, so only briefly was I impressed knowing that! By the way, there is something I have never uttered to anyone and I say it to you now, hoping it will not be said again until perhaps Andrew and Anita's education on family values. That being: 'my great grandfather died in the 1906 earthquake'

which is the sort of statement blondes at Acalanes make while twirling bleached pony tails, hoping to impress their *origin* status with whomever they are speaking. I detest that entire line of 'I was here first' approach to life and I trust you will respect that."

"Easy; I don't say 'my ancestors arrived on The Mayflower' and neither of us say Carole's great grandfather died in the 1906 earthquake; deal?"

The extended hug and moist kisses that followed were totally predictable; and it was not yet 8:30!

"Now, moving on to more recent times," as she separated from me, "you well understand Senior had a favorite and it would be me. Junior began his wayward habits around my fifth birthday; Senior took this very hard and spent the next five years attempting to get Junior back onto the work-not-play routine of life. It never happened of course. And then there was Hilda, who wasted perhaps two years dealing with Junior's absence before she elected to follow the same trail. That left Her and me basically living with Senior, Gracie and George, which would continue until he died with me on his lap late in December, 1948. You once mentioned television and yes, there is a modern receiver in Senior's Study. I find it very difficult to watch television and you can work out why, although the present behind-door device was delivered here by the Admiral Corporation back in August; it is a full-color receiver, although in fact this model will not be available to the public until sometime in December. And before you ask why; in my private portfolio of Senior assets there are 10,000 shares in Admiral, plus their chief engineer is a member of the Ham Club on the hill."

"I hesitate to interrupt, but you said 'a full-color receiver' sits behind a closed door in The Study?"

"I said that and it does; but please my dear Bobby - do not become distracted by anything so trivial. We have our life to work out here; not some stupid television set presence in Senior's Study!"

"Agreed," but the pioneer color aspect of an in-this-house receiver would linger past tonight's revelations. 'Nobody has color and this has been here since I *first* stayed overnight?' would linger for months. It was the

electronics is my second passion mindset at work; Carole of course being my *first* passion.

"Continuing, as for Marie; we are engaged, ready to be married on April 20th, and everything about us is *us*; two people, as one. She may well have problems with this plan, but she is our accountant, not a social interventionist. You do understand me here?"

"I do. But why do you suspect she may attempt to be more than our accountant?"

"Her off-hand comment about two daughters aged 19 and 20 and her lack of trust for them to deal with a \$20-a-week allowance. Marie is old school and while I - we - might have no direct problem with that method of thinking, she is not here to influence our personal relationship. Is that too harsh?"

"You don't intend to tell her about the ore cart in Carson City?"

"Absolutely not! That is *our* family information and the last thing someone here to straighten out the stock certificate holdings needs to know as a distraction is fifty-million or whatever it may turn out to be in gold and silver!"

"Go on."

"There is not much more for tonight; this has progressed faster than I expected. You know the John Junior and Hilda story, the Her story, but there is one more topic I intended to save until after Marie left."

"And it is?"

"Schooling. I've broached this subject a couple of times in an off-handed way. Here is the crux of it, not a complete logical discussion tonight. I have physical plans for you when we finish and don't wish to distract your mind - or body! Question: Why do people complete high school and go on to university?"

The question was obviously, even to me, much deeper than it sounded. The answer was so apparent I knew it had to be incomplete.

"One or both of us has a family to raise and support; high school advances us to university, which in turn leads to one or more degrees, providing a passport to earning significant money. Is that too simplistic?"

"It is the answer I expected. But my fiancé, suppose you were co-owner of say three hundred million dollars in assets? Why wouldn't you - couldn't you - simply say 'alright - I will devote myself to using this resource to support my family'? Why spend, in our case, two-plus more years in high school and then four to six years in university, only to obtain a piece of paper that qualifies us - you and or me - to earn say \$30,000 a year? A three hundred-million asset will create \$3,000,000 yearly income at just *one* percent interest. Tell me how spending the next six to eight years to qualify for a \$30,000-a-year position makes any sense to us?"

The concept was *pure Carole* and she had been dangling it in front of me for several weeks. But it took this six-sentence statement for the proposition to actually register. She knew this from my previous reactions to her tempting suggestions. Now for the first time, my response was commensurate with the reality.

"Oh wow! I never thought about it this way. So my dear - *why* are we messing with OJTs and Acalanes?"

Two hands reached for mine and they grasped firmly. "Timing my love; California law requires we must be registered in school until age 16. April 20th is not merely our first day of wedded bliss, it might also be our day telling Acalanes and all school Vaya con-Dios! And that leaves you and I with fashioning a suitable reason why we do not return to school in January without creating a newspaper headline that reads 'Millionaire kids ditch school at 15!'."

Chapter Thirty-Three

Welcome Hilda Marie McNamara!

Thursday, Friday and Saturday would become a 72-hour blur, remarkable only because by Saturday evening Carole seemed to be done and dusted with the Marie preparation. Somehow during this period she had used Senior's Red-Ham-Book to locate two contractors; one to create from a sketch we jointly prepared an attachment to the rear side of the Hacienda using a long-forgotten exterior doorway hidden behind a row of bookshelves in The Library. This would become the new secured area, which by the time the would-be contractor departed on Friday, expanded from a vault into a new concept; a *family* safe-room. The second builder would create what Carole now termed 'an interim darkroom' by converting an unnecessary stall in the 12-car garage; Her's 1951 Ford would simply be disposed of, making that stall available. It was also apparent Carole was giving serious thought in response to her dream; an indoor swimming pool for the children and somehow when this happened, a more complete darkroom would be included. I could act only as a sounding board, being more concerned about the time this was taking her away from completing the Marie assignment. Waiting until after Marie to even start thinking seriously about the new vault, much less the darkroom, seemed a better plan to me. Carole would not be deterred and so before Marie was scheduled to depart on November 13th, heavy equipment would be excavating a sizeable hole just beyond the three-foot thick adobe wall of Senior's Study as we would be completing the first course of Marie-Accounting-101.

Saturday morning over breakfast she addressed the Marie arrival subject. "I have a better plan than asking George to drive us across the Bay Bridge and down to SFO."

"Better means what?" I reacted.

"George is not comfortable driving the bridge or in the messy downtown San Francisco traffic required to go from bridge-end to the Bayshore Highway. I don't blame him personally - I would have the same reaction if you or I were of driving age. So guess how we get Marie from the San Francisco airport to here?"

"Taxi? Limousine?"

"Try Doctor Abraham Scott."

"Scotty? Brilliant!"

"And of course he plans to have dinner with us Sunday night; both of them apparently are happily married, but we should not forget they were engaged to one another 30 or so years ago. I plan to call Marie to advise her of this arrangement after breakfast. You do think it a suitable solution?"

"I do; we should expect them back here by what time?"

"The flight arrives at 12 noon if on time; I'd say before 2, unless of course they stop for a meal and become wound-up reliving the past."

And so it would come to pass; Hilda Marie McNamara and Abraham Scott would pull into the Caldecott Hacienda front gate at almost precisely 2PM on Sunday, November 8, 1953. Until that moment, Carole buried herself in Senior's study, rehearsing and rethinking every aspect of her oratory planned for delivery. I in turn would hunker-down in The Library surrounded by OJT school papers, preparing for the eventual return visits ahead. The chatter of a Royal Quiet Deluxe typewriter, running at a typing speed I did not previously believe Carole capable of, began immediately following the quick breakfast and did not let up for several hours. My quick math suggested she was creating at least a thousand words each hour and yes, I was impressed!

Lunch was light and for Carole barely dented; mine was only slightly more consumed. Both of us exhibited nervous tummy symptoms, which by 7PM would be only modestly improved. Gracie and George spent the morning redoing from ceiling to floor every nook and cranny of a bottom floor guest bedroom which in fact I had never entered and perhaps did not even know existed. I could hear them working down the hall from my assigned area and when discovering them moving furniture and scrubbing

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floors, it dawned on me 'I have never in fact had a full-tour of this house; someday *my* house!'

By 2:30 Carole had Hilda Marie settled into a comfortable chair George confiscated somewhere for The Study and she was away. I was allowed to drift in and out, usually unnoticed or commented upon, but the obvious plan was for Marie to listen and Carole to start at the very beginning in explaining first of all how and why a not-yet-16-year-old was in fact in-command of such a vast enterprise; make that plural; enterprises. Marie, during the first thirty minutes, would stop Carole for questions; this pretty much ceased between 3 and 4, as Marie realized if she was patient, every question she might have was scheduled for addressing anyhow. I noticed she was taking copious notes, not on the usual yellow legal pad, but rather in a brand new college-grade 3-ring binder notebook, which I would eventually determine had a taped-in-place typed label reading 'The Caldecott Matter'. Once or twice I was able to stand behind her long enough to work out she was using some form of shorthand, as a stenographer might, for her notes; only corporate names, dates and numbers were legible to my non-shorthand trained mind. By 5 Carole had Marie fully up to speed on the intricacies of the 'Caldecott Quadrangle', as she elected to call the family and all of its tentacles. And before 6 Carole had explained the various reasons she and I would be married on 20 April 1954. That explanation did result in a series of questions from Marie, including one she insisted on returning to three times when I by chance was in the room.

"A prenuptial agreement to make very clear Bobby's legal rights to your estate holdings?"

This subject had never been discussed by Carole and me and in fact it took Marie asking it the second time before their conversation allowed my mind to comprehend what a 'prenuptial agreement' even meant. I felt very embarrassed by the discussion, certain I should silently exit the room, which Carole immediately noticed as she paraphrased the same answer given when first asked.

"No prenuptial; not even open for discussion. He did not select me; I selected him and I devoted two years of my life searching for the proper

lifelong partner. You may see this only as a rush-to-marriage to satisfy a legal question concerning my status as a quarter-owner of a seventy million-dollar trust estate. I do not. And I assure you Bobby does not. Yes, we will be barely old enough to marry in April; yes, under more normal circumstances society might, even would, frown on such a marriage. There is nothing 'normal' about this situation, as I hope you are now slowly realizing. I ask you to not stutter on this point, nor be distracted by it. This may be concerning to you; what is concerning to Bobby and I is defining the size and scope of my total assets beyond the family trust and ultimately how we, not some outside party or parties, are in 100 percent control of those properties."

Marie would venture onto this dangerous ground one final time just before the scheduled break at 7 for an exquisite Gracie dinner of roast lamb. Carole's slightly irritated response, clearly evident to Marie, was one sentence. "Robert Britt Cooper is of Mayflower stock and there is more than a numerical coincidence he and I were born on the same date in 1938; please, let us move far-far away from this subject." Overhearing this, 'Well', I thought to myself, 'at least she did not reveal *my* great-grandfather died in the 1906 earthquake'.

It would be over for the first session; dinner with an exuberant Scotty would complete after eight and it being obvious the doctor and Marie desired some catch-up time together, Carole properly suggested they could stay up 'while Bobby and I will be off to our bedroom' with a particular emphasis on *our*. My fiancée was still slightly smarting from Marie's attempt to be a mother-figure, intruding into a family she did not control or manage. Carole and I would assume, quite correctly, most of the catch-up on Marie's part would amount to an inquisition of Scotty concerning not only Carole but the Caldecott family. None of this concerned Carole as we did our own bed-top review of the day's events.

"I saw both parts of this when she arrived," she would summarize for me prior to using an unusual amount of emotion and strength to take advantage of my flat-on-my-back posture. "She is a mother, totally unlike Hilda, who actually participates in her two daughter's lives. I, to her, am a maverick youngster exceptionally well versed for my age. At one point when you

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were out of the room, she tried to compliment me by saying 'setting aside your age, your skill levels are so high I would hire you in a minute to work in my office.' To which I answered, 'at what? Thirty thousand a year?' And she answered 'that is actually higher than my starting salary for a four-year university graduate'. And I answered 'Marie, my full estate paying just one percent interest accumulates \$3,000,000 a year for me. Tell me how and why I should even consider a \$30,000-a-year position with anyone?' She went blank in the face as this reality sunk-in. And that was almost immediately before we stopped for dinner. She will have some difficulty sleeping tonight; that is my prediction!"

Neither Carole nor I did; it was almost - not quite because of the dratted cast - like pre-stress times. But a buzzing intercom, just minutes before our KWBR alarm radio would kick-in, awoke us at 6:58. Carole was quickly out of bed, naked, and answered the call which could only have originated with Gracie. The message was, "pick up the telephone; it is Doctor Scott."

I would require a summary from Carole after perhaps four or five minutes of prying open my still fluttering eyelids.

"Scotty has talked with John Taylor - the attorney - remember? And he had talked with Hilda Marie late last evening after Scotty departed. He is asking permission to join us, Tuesday if possible, concerned about the legal ownership status of the 29 corporations my stock certificates from Senior represent. Scotty assures me there is no question about my ownership, but there are concerns about how we announce ourselves to these nearly thirty firms and ask for access to their financial records. John sees a Hilda Marie element in this step and well - I believe I agree."

"So Taylor will be here?"

"Directly from San Diego to Oakland, simplifying picking him up; no Bay Bridge to cross, no cross-town San Francisco traffic."

"One obvious concern - pardon me for even thinking of it?"

"The OJTs?"

"Correct. I don't think 'excuse me, but this conversation needs to halt for an hour while Carole and I deal with tenth grade history' seems appropriate!"

"You call - or I?" she asked; the answer being obvious.

"I will, telling them we have something just short of the Bubonic Plague or whatever stops their questions after also missing last week."

"For all of this week - yes?"

"Of course."

"The Bubonic plague - I could actually get Scotty to create a letter using that; maybe you are on to something for post-December! Oh yes - make sure the school understands two things: first, the OJTs will be paid for this week as well as last, even without showing up, and second, we are contagious and this is our doctor's suggestion they not be exposed to whatever it is you decide to tell them."

It would be later to my surprise that Scotty appeared just as Carole, Marie and I were picking at the elaborate breakfast, which obviously disappointed Gracie, because we consumed less than half of what she had created. Under more-normal circumstances, pancakes, waffles, fresh strawberries and cream with copious amounts of thick bacon would have been a treat. For us, Monday morning, it was simply more like a dinner than a breakfast. This did not stop Carole and me from lavishing compliments on Gracie, nor would it erase the frown on her face as she removed the uneaten portions. Scotty would help a bit by picking up a plate of uneaten portions to carry to The Study. Most of this would end up back in the kitchen however.

Scotty's presence had been at Carole's suggestion; the doctor had cancelled all of his morning appointments and was there to help Marie through what remained a difficult minefield of family theatrics. As she said to me, while the doctor and Marie went ahead of us to The Study, "She keeps burping on my age - our age - and until she stops this *mother business*, it will be difficult to get her to focus on the real issues here. Scotty can help and he actually volunteered to do so on the phone this morning. He is absolutely dying to reveal the contents of the Carson City ore cart to Marie and I am equally dying that he *not* do so. It would only make Marie more anxious about the wisdom for an almost-16 to be in charge here."

Life with Carole Ann Caldecott Cooper was never likely to be dull

"Miss Caldecott," Marie began in a formal tone neither Carole nor I had previously experienced. "Scotty has been immensely helpful here; I realized this morning my own family relationships were intruding on this situation and it was very difficult for me to get past your age, no matter how bright and capable you might be. And, your marriage plans only make this more difficult for me as I try to envisage either of my daughters in the reverse of your situation; capable, moneyed male racing off to a premature-by-age-only marriage. I do not apologize, but I do state Scotty has helped me through this and I am pleased he is here for at least this morning. I trust he is being well paid for his time!"

Carole responded, as always, correctly. "No apology required nor expected. And Scotty is Bobby's and my mentor; lacking a father figure for myself, Scotty fills that vacuum."

"OK then; starting from the top. You own by stock certificates 29 businesses, none of which we know very much about save through November, 1948 each was paying Senior a rather handsome profit either monthly or annually. And Scotty has directed my attention to the surprise that you own his medical building and in fact his monthly rent has gone to your company, which in turn is a corporation. So I wish to focus on dissecting who these accounting firms are, and their legal representatives, that from December, 1948 have apparently continued operating these companies to the advantage of who-knows-whom?"

"*That* is why I asked you to spend the week with us," Carole answered.

"And your payment is more than noted; quite generous in fact; I had expected some haggling from you about this, but you beat me to that discussion by simply offering me an amount that exceeded my requirements."

"Need I remind you what a one percent interest return on the total assets builds to each year?"

Marie smiled and looked briefly at Scotty, who was displaying an unusually broad-lipped expression. "You do not; I must admit, when you recited those numbers for me late yesterday, all of the balls on the table rolled into the cups. Now, John Taylor will join us tomorrow. I have your list of 29 fully-owned companies covered by your six stock certificates. I really regret never

knowing or meeting John Senior; of all of the clients I have ever known, worked for, or met, his approach to assets stands head and shoulders - and tens if not hundreds of millions of dollars - ahead of them all."

'And she does not even know about Carson City!' raced through my mind.

"Please explain how you or John Henry, from a list of 29 companies that perhaps have ignored John Senior's ownership of all of their stock and therefore assets, will move to 'Carole Ann Caldecott-Cooper' as their boss?"

"Do you really plan to operate 29 companies?"

"I do not, Bobby does not; these are an inherited investment and quite separately, as I have previously detailed for you, I already own and actively oversee the operation of two radio stations and other similar investments bestowed to me directly in John Senior's will. I do not wish to become an overseer of 29 companies that catch salmon, sell books, and publish newspapers and so on. When you have this worked out in your mind, please suggest how we replace the present accountants and attorneys with a single entity that does this for all of them under one regime or umbrella."

If there was a carrot to be dangled, Carole has just turned it into a *bunch* and Marie's eyes revealed she understood the message; 'The Caldecott Estate' as a client?

"Being out of my office, I can only tell you the six accounting firms listed as managing - and I use that word as descriptive, not knowing their level of competence - your assets are neither AAA and possibly not even A grade. They are small, private firms scattered from Sacramento to Monterey and John Taylor advises me the law firms John Senior had involved are of a similar stature. In other words, nobody is a name firm. That does not concern me, yet, but there is a reason why your master Trust is with a national firm and that is simply dependable integrity. What I am attempting to say, without raising too many alarm bells, is this: given Senior's death these small firms, with no real built-in oversight, could pretty much do as they wished with the businesses, while siphoning off the profits claiming operational expenses. I need far more time and access to records to prove or disprove that statement and I mention it primarily because the period December, 1948 to the present

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may involve irretrievable personal-to-you losses which even lawsuits cannot recover. Are you prepared for that possibility?"

"I am prepared, but not eliminating the opportunity to recover those funds if they were in fact misappropriated."

"Well Carole, that will be a legal situation where my expertise will be confined to giving testimony; you'll have to deal with John Taylor or someone like him to take that step; understood?"

"Reluctantly understood."

"Alright, let us try to focus on the Reno bank account where until late November '48 these various corporations were depositing profit funds to an account held by your grandfather. I understand your attempts to pierce that account to even learn the present balance and the level of activity in it since late '48 has failed; yes?"

"Correct. The bank general manger was friendly, even recalls John Senior fondly, but claims Nevada banking statutes and FDIC regulations prevent him from sharing any information with me. It may have \$1 in it or far more. I have no idea."

"This seems to me to be a pivotal point. If the various Senior-owned corporations were depositing profits into this account up to late November in 1948, chances are there was a cash balance at that time. If they continued to deposit profits, even after his death, the account should have increased at a rate that approximated what he received before dying. In five years, as I see the profit numbers through late '48, this account should have many millions of dollars just sitting there. But if the accounting firms and lawyers handling these 29 corporations suddenly ceased their profit-payments after his death, well, that becomes a matter for the Nevada or California Attorney General. This may become quite messy."

"So we await a court order created by John Henry Taylor?"

"He won't be here until tomorrow and I have no idea how long it might take to get a judge to issue a ruling. Let's have one more shot at the Reno bank manager; please get him on the telephone, since you are known to him, introduce me and let me try. If we could learn just two things - the present balance, and, the date of the last deposit, it would be immensely helpful."

"I have the number right here; I am dialling."

Several minutes went by, long enough for me to attach the shared speaker, allowing us to overhear the Reno end of the conversation. Marie was impressed by this technology, muttering something under her breath, which later translated to, 'can I get one of these, please?'

Carole's initial exchange with the bank manager, Ben Campbell, went smoothly and he rather quickly asked 'what progress with a court order?' She immediately shifted that question to an explanation of who Hilda Marie McNamara was and with Campbell's permission handed the Bell instrument to her.

Initially the conversation ran into stone walls; Campbell acted totally unable to divulge any information, although the tone of his voice suggested he knew intimately the answers to her questions. And then he said something which failed to register with Marie immediately after she outlined the 'sad plight of a 15-year-old granddaughter who is left only with legal recourse to learn about her own willed assets'. Marie's statement was straight out of radio's '*Our-Gal-Sunday*' soap opera and Campbell bit hard.

"Alright, I might be terminated for telling you this, but I do so because John Caldecott was more than a client; he was a fellow *ham* radio operator." This was the line that caused Marie to stare at each of us with a total '*what is this?*' look on her face. Both Carole and I suddenly had smiles a mile wide; W6HD to the rescue!

"The account today has over seventy in it."

Marie was quick to fall into the Carson City trap.

"Thousand?"

"You joke Mrs McNamara! Add three zeros."

It took her several large gulps of air to restart. "And the date of the last deposit?"

"Last week; Wednesday to be precise and that is absolutely the end of what I am willing to divulge without a court order. How long do you estimate it will take? I'd really like to get this off my 'do-today' list."

Marie was initially dumbfounded, hanging up the phone almost without ceremony, but Carole grabbed it before termination occurred and talked

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for thirty additional seconds with Campbell, thanking him profusely for his help. She also commented on the 'fellow ham' and mentioned inviting Ben to 'visit us anytime and operate at W6HD'. It was heartfelt and sincere and the Reno bank manager understood the sentiment involved in the offer.

Marie did not. She had only vaguely ever heard of ham radio ('I think one of my clients at channel two Denver is a ham', she offered) and showed no appreciation how the camaraderie of fellow hams could transcend even legal barriers. But for right now, she was far more overloaded - not just overwhelmed - by learning Carole's assets, however much they might ultimately prove to be, were now 'seventy million REAL dollars greater'. She would say so after Carole terminated the call.

"Seventy million dollars? Oh my! Do you realize that is almost exactly what the entire trust estate was valued at in 1948? And short of a court order, all of it goes into your asset pile Carole! Does this excite you?"

In fact it did not; like me running my fingers through bags filled with 100 or 200 vintage gold coins; suddenly or perhaps not so suddenly, all of this simply added 'more zeros' to Carole's challenge dealing with it all. Marie now had, less any knowledge of the Carson City gold and silver cache, a direct view of real cash - *lots* of real cash. It would instantly change her attitude about Carole and representing her from this point forward. And we all would notice the transition. Over the next hour, pressing 11 at the end, John Henry Taylor's Tuesday arrival took on second level importance. Marie assumed, and she tried to convince the rest of us, "getting a court order to access the seventy million is routine; where we need to focus now is 'what do you do with this money?'. She obviously had a number of suggestions involving investments.

I did not read Carole's face that way at all. It seemed each time she and I turned over a new rock in John-Senior's past, big dollars crawled out. I tried to modify 300 million as known probable assets with the newly discovered 70 million and while the arithmetic was first-grade level, the new number was not. And I could see the same concern in Carole's eyes. 'Was this ever going to end?' was my interpretation of my fiancée's expression.

The answer, by Thursday, would be 'no - it is not going to end - yet.'

Chapter Thirty-Four

Money, money in the hand: Isn't this grand?

John Henry Taylor's Tuesday arrival was anti-climatic. By his appearance Marie was so internally involved in 'how *I* can assist Carole in managing the assets' the tenor of virtually all discussions had shifted. Perhaps Marie was not irrational, but she was clearly focused on opportunity. All of that money, sitting there in the hands of a not-yet-legal age minor, was more than Marie could deal with emotionally. John Henry's arrival for the first hour was almost exclusively limited, at Marie's insistence, on whether someone not-yet-16 could, in fact, be self-responsible for a fortune probably exceeding 300 million dollars. Marie wanted his assurance Carole did not require a parent or court-appointed supervisor to make financial decisions. Carole quite quickly saw where all of these conversations were pointed and equally correctly decided to let them talk it out knowing, at the end of the day, if in fact not-yet- being 16 *was* a problem, all she had to do was drag the matter past April 20th.

Attorney Taylor had not been there long enough at this point to develop his own 'how can *I* provide long-term client assistance?' mindset and more important, he had missed Carole's initial show and tell for Marie. He was sitting down in the 8th round of a championship 12-rounder and being asked to judge, without explanation, the first 60% of the action.

"I know of nothing in California law which prohibits a 15-year-old from owning whatever they wish," he finally began and then adding as an afterthought, "except perhaps liquor licenses. The issues here are not legal ownership, rather they might - I said *might* - involve the method of acquisition. I am at a disadvantage coming in late; perhaps Carole could break down the categories of things owned for me?"

Carole saw this as perhaps the first non-self-serving progress for the day and responded by reaching for a single file, extracting a page she had in fact created Sunday morning prior to Marie's arrival.

"There are 'X' categories of asset sources," she began "summarized here. Starting at the top the Master Trust, which is in fact several trusts under a single administrative roof, defines the way Senior allowed my parents, sister and me to access the therein listed assets. With me so far?"

"It is this asset group where you and your sister will by age 20 become quarter participants in what I believe you now term 'The Seventy Million' base?"

"Almost correct. In the final version of this, as revealed by the Trust attorneys, there appears a hand-written addition creating an exception to the age-20 rule. It is here," handing John Henry the fabled page. Silence followed as he studied the full paragraph and placing his finger on the "should she marry..." addendum read it aloud.

"There has been an authenticity test for this addition?"

"Many times and no - authenticity is not an issue here."

"And what limits are placed on participating members - the four of you - concerning use of the Trust assets?"

"Page six, paragraph four," now handing Henry a sheet from a separate file. "Assuming all four of us are qualified as equal participants - that is either age twenty or in the case of my sister and I, married prior, individuals may tap the asset base for up to five million in collateral value. That is a total sum, whether it comes from one five million swipe or ten 500 hundred thousand forays. Further, two of us can agree to five million each as a single act; an example of this happened just days ago when Hilda and John Caldecott headed off for Argentina after deciding to become partners by investing nine million in a cattle ranch there. In theory all four of us could encumber up to twenty million, assuming the other Trust conditions are met. That could be five each or twenty total as a group act."

John Henry raised his hand while rereading the relevant Trust paragraph; he was not requesting permission to use the restroom, only silence.

Money, money in the hand: Isn't this grand?

Handing the two Trust pages back to Carole, he restarted. "The Trust seeks to protect the original value from gross misuse and while I accept without question the 'Seventy Million' tag on it, Hilda assures me the 1953 value would now be larger, perhaps significantly. And I understand how various dividend-paying stocks and term deposit accounts within the Trust are used to create annualized income for all four beneficiaries. Carole, this is all very logical and straightforward if also quite clever. And I can perhaps begin to appreciate why you plan to be married in April, as I understand from Scotty there are some issues between you and your sister as well as with your parents. I do not wish or need to go there, at least not now. So yes, you have today a limited claim on the Trust assets and after marriage your claim will be the same as the other three family members. Now, outside the Trust there are additional assets I believe?"

Carole was prepared to go for stock certificates but thought a few *minor* matters should be cleared up first.

"This page from his Last Will and Testament, separate from the Trust documents, sets out a number of items willed to me personally," handing over a copy.

John Henry ran his finger down a numerical list verbalizing each item as he did so. "Title to fifty acres on Grizzly Peak Boulevard and the buildings and apparatus thereon"; "Full ownership through a stock certificate and FCC licenses for radio stations KWBR and KFRS"; "six vehicles, a coin collection, stamp collection, hillside tram system - do I need to know what the last one means?"

Carole merely shook her head in the negative.

"Quite a list; setting aside the two radio stations, which obviously have a day-to-day commercial aspect, is there anything else worthy of my time here?"

"Only your verification that anything on that list, which nobody in the family has ever questioned by the way, is in fact clearly mine without respect to concerns about my age?"

Scotty and I glanced at each other when John Henry had said 'a coin collection', exchanging knowing winks as I thought to myself 'there are coin collections and *then* there is Carson City; never the two shall meet'.

"Very simple legal question; whether you were ten weeks, months or years when the will went into effect is not an issue. And I take your point that other members of the family have never contested this list; that is what you inferred?"

"That is correct. Each of them also received something outside of their participation in the master Trust; my sister's list begins at the bottom of the page you hold now."

"And you have never wished to contest items appearing in their individual bequests?"

"Never, nor do I now."

"What remains then is the primary reason I am here; yes? Twenty-nine we believe functioning companies represented as near as we can determine by six holding companies all 100 percent owned by John Caldecott Senior. May I now see the six stock certificates?"

Resting nearest to Marie, she passed them to her former UC school chum who began taking copious notes while also talking. "Nothing out of the ordinary with the certificates, and the endorsements to Carole Ann Caldecott on the back side seem proper and I note a notary seal stamped onto the endorsement area, thereby creating a trail to authenticity of the transfers. There is no date on the transfer portion, not that one is required, and none within the notary seal; again, not that one is required. Stock certificates, like a stamp collection, have no age rules; these could be processed and new certificates issued by my office with no legal issues. But there is for me something missing here. Marie, those 29 companies represented by these six holding corporations; should there not be additional certificates - 29 in fact?"

"If they exist, so far they have escaped detection; correct Carole?"

"True; what we have in lieu of these are monthly, semi-annual and annual financial reports issued on behalf of each of the accountants overseeing one or more of these businesses. These reports were last dated late in November of '48 and after back-tracking and spreadsheet entering the numbers for each, which in the minimum instance covers the years '45 to '48 while some go back further, we have a financial history of each."

Money, money in the hand: Isn't this grand?

"Until yesterday," Marie interjected, "there was no proof of continued activity past November '48. I was able to pry limited information from the Wells Fargo office in Reno, which verifies some level of profit payments to Senior past the end of 1948 have apparently continued, with the most recent deposit just days ago. From Carole's end of '48 numbers to the current balance it would appear something approaching a total of a million dollars has been deposited each month from the various corporations."

"Excuse me Marie! Sixty months - sixty million dollars in that account, today?"

"The banker said 'in excess of seventy'."

"Now I see why we need to get this account in Carole's name with some haste. But wait a minute; where in any of Carole's will bequeaths does it say 'Bank Account in Reno'?"

"No place," answered Carole. "But the account was clearly for the benefit of Senior and the six holding companies I now own and we do have the bank deposit slips through November '48 as indication of pre-death procedures."

John Henry stood, ostensibly to stretch his cramped legs, but actually to walk off building anxiety. "Lacking a clearly worded, officially acceptable, statement of Senior's intent for you to have access to the Reno account, it becomes a judicial decision. Yes, we can show past procedures and intent; assigning the corporations to you is clear-cut, but it may not be sufficient to obtain a court order erasing your grandfather from the account and substituting you. The name on the account is simply 'John Andrew Caldecott' and this Orinda address; correct?"

"Less perhaps the address, that is correct. There are at least two pocket-sized check books as well with unused checks in each and several packets of cancelled checks which I have not gone through yet."

"The cancelled checks are in envelopes?"

"Yes, addressed to an Orinda postal box that has been in this family's use for much longer than I have been alive."

Carole abruptly turned to me, pointing at the doorway. Twisting, I saw nobody there and stared back at her. Again she was pointing, more briskly

now. Guessing at the message, I reached for my crutches and said, "Excuse me folks - Carole can you accompany me upstairs please? We won't be long."

In fact we would only go down the hallway in the general direction of a bathroom, which we entered and she shut the door.

"The check book is the answer," she began.

"How?" I asked.

"I will overnight sign Senior's signature on several checks at the end of the books; no date, no amount, just his signature. Tomorrow *you* discover these signed checks when I ask you to locate the box I've not yet studied. Sort of a 'hey people - look here; Senior left several partially completed checks at the rear of these books'!"

"The signature should not appear fresh," I began; "at least five years old."

"At the rear of his middle desk drawer is a box of special pens he had since before our birth date. Anyone who tests the ink will determine it is not modern stuff; they were created by some guy before the roller point pens were popular and I'll use one which shows signs of prior use, being careful not to erase his fingerprints if they might be there. This whole legal procedure discussion is starting to bug me and we just want it tuned-out!"

There was now a plan. She did not have to explain to me the wisdom of signing more than one check and these at the rear, where they might go unnoticed for a very long time, if ever discovered. A signed check, newly completed with a modern pen naming Carole Ann Caldecott as the payee, would transfer whatever the account now held to one of Carole's; the additional signed checks would cover future deposits until the 'judicial procedures' were completed. I saw the risk of discovery, but also recognized that ultimately this *was* her money anyhow; only one signature away.

We returned to The Study as Scotty reappeared to announce to Marie and John Henry, "You two will be my guests for dinner; Carole, John Henry has agreed to let me put him up at home. I'll return Marie after we all run out of stories to tell. You and Bobby can call it an early night if that suits everyone."

Money, money in the hand! Isn't this grand?

Carole quickly agreed and Marie excused herself to freshen up; in ten minutes Carole and I would be alone with Gracie and a dinner she planned for four or five. Once again our housemother would be less than pleased with events. Neither of us had much to say during the meal. Carole had already placed a small cardboard box on the first level stairway; inside were all of the cancelled checks and a string-tied envelope containing the partially used check books.

"You are comfortable doing this?" she asked while loading me onto the first level tram.

"Totally. We could spend months and tens of thousands in fees just to end up where tomorrow one signature will take us. I have no negatives here at all."

"Good; I knew you'd say that, but before doing the deed, just wanted to confirm. We are a twosome today and forever plus one day!" and off we went to level three.

"Find me the last dated cancelled checks; hopefully October '48 so I can compare the signature at that time with the one imprinted in my mind."

The number of cancelled check envelopes, by month, was actually not great, indicating prior to January 1948 all of the earlier checks had been either stored or destroyed, which prodded my mind to, "That suggests Senior may have had an accountant involved in his own *personal* finances; another new mystery to run down'.

"Carole, actually we have the November '48 checks and there are a couple of dozen here; his signature seems to be uniform, but you will know instantly," and she slipped over from her work desk to take the aging bank envelope.

Untying the string securing the medium-sized brown envelope, something Carole had possibly done before me recently, out tumbled four check books; two were half consumed, all four being on the Reno Wells Fargo account. I took them in order but Senior had the habit of not writing down dates or even the payee; just amounts which in book one varied from \$1 to \$5,000. I tried to imagine what he would purchase for \$1 with a check and gave up; it was all a fantasy anyhow. I did intend to run the HP on the

undated check stubs to total the amount out of idle curiosity and then I went into book two. For some reason, unknown to me, these all seemed to be for larger amounts; one for \$3,200,000. What also stood out were the precisely even numbers; seldom involving anything other than three, four, five or six zeroes. Senior did not mess around bothering with dollars and cents! With check books one and two I went to the end through the unused checks knowing it would be one or more of these that Carole would select for her signature-act.

Books three and four were unused from the front and I almost stopped even inspecting them until by chance the fourth book fell open from the rear exposing the last check from the backside. 'Hello? What is this??' turning that check to the rear to expose the front, my heart did one of two things and I would never sort out which. There in perfect John Senior print appeared 'Carole Ann Caldecott' on the pay-to line and at the bottom in the proper spot both his printed signature and the scrawl representing cursive. No date, no amount; just the two most important elements in creating a check. Dumbfounded to the point of silence, while my instincts were to yell to Carole across the room, I flipped back to the preceding check and the next. Five checks, all ready to complete and present to the bank. The ink was not 'old' but it certainly had been on paper for many years. I lingered thinking about this, staring at my fiancée whom I could see was carefully creating on a notepad the same two signatures as taken from a series of November 1948 checks. A moment of total elation was followed by 'how do I do this without making Carole bounce off of walls?'

"Darling girl," I began. "How is it coming - any late '48 changes in the way Senior signed his name?"

She turned and smiled. "Have the check books sorted?"

I smiled back and responded, "Here - perhaps this example will be even more useful," holding up check book four with my index finger marking the first of the five checks, but folded shut. She headed towards me, bent to kiss my forehead and then glanced at the folded over bank instrument. "May I see?"

Money, money in the hand: Isn't this grand?

Moving the book directly before her eyes at around a foot distance, my thumb flipped it open, displaying the signed check made out to her. The face went rapidly from confusion to sheer delight to both of her hands grabbing wildly to extract the check book.

"Oh my God! Oh my God! Oh my *wonderful* grandfather!!" And she collapsed onto my chest, holding the instrument delicately away from both of our bodies, tears streaming and her chest heaving.

Sixty seconds crawled by and finally she was giving in to near total collapse as the check book slid from her hand lying - I was quick to verify this - out of harm's way. And I felt comfortable speaking again.

"There are five checks just like the one you saw. Senior has done it again - anticipating your need and arranging for it in advance. He loved you very, very much."

Chapter Thirty-Five

Mr Campbell – a courier is on the way

"Marie, John Henry, Scotty - I trust you all had an enjoyable reunion last evening?" Carole was addressing the freshly assembled quintet but not anxious to give our secret immediately away. Each spoke of their enjoyment and had one personal story to relate, usually about another, all creating peals of laughter. Carole and I laughed along, mostly out of politeness, and when after ten minutes it became repetitive she moved to the telephone and announced, "I am calling the Reno bank and manager Ben Campbell; you will see why shortly."

"Do you think *one more* call is going to change his mind about revealing account details?" asked Marie as Carole waited for Campbell to answer his extension number. "Something you uncovered last evening while Scotty, John and I were recreating our youth?" It was her lingering mother thing at work.

"Ben, Carole Caldecott; how are you this fine morning?" I realized she had not pushed the power switch on the share-with-all speaker and pointed at it; quickly corrected just in time to hear the banker respond "...and it is snowing this morning. I trust W6HD has no snow yet?"

"No and none expected. About the court order - yes?"

"Yes, go on."

"I now have an attorney working on this and in fact he is here with me now, listening. But to get past a judicial order I have a new plan."

"As I said to your accountant on Monday, I need to get this off my 'do-today' list, so enlighten me."

"Last evening my fiancée discovered the last Wells Fargo checking account books of grandfather and there at the back of a book we found not one but several checks which read as follows:

"Pay to and that is followed in John Senior's own inimitable style of printing 'Carole Ann Caldecott' and then the date, amount to be paid remains to be filled in. At the bottom right, his signature in both forms; the aforementioned printing and his swirl that you and I both recognize as his excuse for cursive. I propose, after you give me the exact amount in that account today, to fill in the missing amount and today's date and courier the check to you. The check will include a deposit slip to a Wells Fargo account I maintain here in my name. So far any problems?"

"A very neat solution Miss Caldecott; well done and no problems, but one other issue you would not know existed."

"And *that* is?"

"Breathe easy - it is not a negative; quite the opposite. Your grandfather had a standing policy with this account; it is interest-bearing and whenever the interest on the sum of the account passes a million dollars, the interest and the interest alone automatically transfers to a second account which over time also bears interest. The end of this trail is his second account, interest, recently went past seven million which means, while I will of course honor his check to your account for the principle - although I would suggest something slightly smaller - what do you wish me to do with the interest portion?"

"Today's principal account amount is?"

"There were two additional deposits yesterday, so today it sits at just over seventy-one million six hundred thousand."

"Ben - his check to me will be for seventy eight million; made up of seventy-one from principal, seven from interest. Is that satisfactory?"

I made it a point to stare first at Marie and then John Henry; both were fixated on Carole with very wide eyes. A quick snapshot of Scotty would have shown him grinning massively.

"Totally, young lady. And as an aside, your grandfather talked about you a great deal when visiting; you are in fact the younger granddaughter - yes?"

"I am."

"Good - he did not talk very much about your older sister. Now, is the attorney available and if yes, might I talk with him? Not about this - it follows procedure. But about what he needs to do to get the account name changed so we don't spend the next six months or longer dealing with an account that is obviously improperly named here."

"His name is John - John Henry Taylor and thank you Ben; look forward to seeing you on a visit to W6HD one day soon. Here now is John."

"Bless you Carole Caldecott!"

The conversation with John Henry was brief as the banker attempted to explain just what any judicial ruling should say in authorizing Wells Fargo to basically change the name on the account. John Henry was still in a daze from listening in as Carole, with complete composure, arranged for seventy-eight million dollars to be transferred to her own bank account; he too having been *slightly* infected by Marie's frequent mention of Carole's age. What he had witnessed happening had nothing to do with age and the revised imprint on his mind was now rather complete.

The telephone being handed back to Carole, placed on the cradle and then neatly restored behind the cabinet door, the room fell totally silent. Carole knew what she had just done, even if Marie and John Henry were still coping with how effortlessly this 'under-sixteen' had resolved the Reno account problem.

"Gracie has coffee, tea and muffins on the table in the alcove; anyone for a break?" It was Carole at her peak.

As the trio trundled off to the kitchen alcove, Carole motioned for me to remain.

"Here, three pieces of paper to sign. The first is a bank card adding you to my local Caldecott household checking account at Wells Fargo; that's where the Reno money is headed. The next one says that if anything happens to me, you are in charge while the third is the reverse; anything happens to you, I am in charge. I have signed all three; please sign with your bank signature all three and initial at the bottom."

"Carole..."

"There is *no* discussion here. We can have that *after* all of these people get out of *our* home. Sign please and remind me we need to talk about our wedding ring designs!"

Every hour past that point was anticlimactic of course. Scotty returned to his medical practice after the alcove interruption but advising me as he left "The x-rays; sorry to be late in mentioning them. They show proper healing and I am optimistic we can get your leg into a last-step version cast by say Thanksgiving. You will probably find one crutch gravitating to no crutch will work by early-December." That would be my third mental boost for the day, although wrapping my mind around being a signature on a bank account shortly to contain more than seventy-eight million dollars would dominate my mind for longer than the leg cast.

John Henry took charge when the quartet resumed work in The Study.

"Marie, your priority is to contact each of the accounting firms. Carole has used the regional telephone books to create a list of their most recent addresses and of course phone numbers. Your task is to determine how, before Senior's death, they provided monthly, semi-annual or annual reports to Senior and whether they can supply these reports from January 1948 to the present. In that process, we also need a list of personnel in each of the Senior businesses they represent. There was one unknown, yes, Carole?"

"An accounting firm listed in Walnut Creek has either gone out of business or changed their name."

"This establishes one more reason why we need the detailed Reno bank records allowing me to trace the source of the deposits. I in turn will concentrate on contacting the attorneys handling the six corporations, and each business itself, to announce their only stockholder is now the granddaughter of Senior. This will not be a rapid process for either Marie or me, but this being Wednesday I suggest we locate work areas here with telephones and simply get on with the task. Marie - you are scheduled home Friday; I will stay until you leave and return to San Diego at that time. What we can't get through here by Thursday evening will simply go back to our offices to be completed. Carole, is there a photocopier here?"

Mr Campbell – a courier is on the way

"The Library; two Model A in fact. When you begin to analyze the stock holdings in the family trusts you will find a sizeable number of debenture shares in Xerox."

"I cannot in good conscience suggest you allow the six certificates out of here, so perhaps you could create front and back copies of..."

"Right here John Henry," reaching for and handing over a file.

"Monday I will create stock certificate changes notifying the state of the new owner for their records. I already have your street and postal box addresses; which one?"

"The box number please; mail to the house has always been an issue with us being at the very end of the line."

And so it went through lunch and the afternoon. Marie's initial assignment was shorter; six names versus 29, but John Henry had telephoned 14 of his larger company list back to San Diego and a legal assistant was attempting to run down the required information from each. They had agreed to merely explain John Andrew Caldecott's assets were being reviewed by a granddaughter bequeathed with ownership in the company being queried. 'This is a get acquainted call,' each elected to begin, 'and there will be no immediate, if ever, changes in the way you have been conducting your business'. That was to put individual concerns to rest, because the last response desired was to start some sort of hysterical reaction to the news.

John Henry was after basics while Marie, speaking as one accountant to another, had a much wider potential range of questions. Lacking the Reno banking deposit details at this stage, she hoped to coerce that and more out of the individual accountants. John Henry's typical calls lasted perhaps 15 minutes; Marie's up to an hour and in a way this created a balance between the efforts.

Carole and I - mostly Carole - drifted from Study to Library and back to John Junior's office; by coincidence both contractors arrived with plans covering the garage modification to include a darkroom and the new 'family-safe-room' outside The Library. Both would have work crews on site late Friday or Saturday. The 'family-safe-room' had, of course, become ten times the original project as it mushroomed from a simplistic thick-walled

steel cage encased in 3-foot thick adobe to a totally self-supporting area capable of sustaining up to six people for three months in the event of a nuclear holocaust. "This may end up costing more than a million," Carole suggested quietly as the contractor walked away from our meeting. "Pay them in gold coin," I responded with a smirk, resulting in a forceful bear hug - pushing me and crutches against a well-placed wall.

An end of afternoon regrouping by the four us, plus Scotty who appeared as we were taking our seats, ended up with mostly positive news. Marie would launch.

"The missing accountant is located; he went from single man shop to a partnership and they adopted a new name, not including the original fellow's. I have only one more to complete tomorrow and believe our question about the missing stock certificates for all of the businesses is answered."

"I probably learned the same answer, but continue please," added John Henry.

"Sole proprietorship; John Andrew Caldecott operated without actually creating stock corporations in each case, but every record I was read clearly stated he owned the company; lock, stock and barrel."

"Their reaction when after nearly five years they should suddenly hear from you; us?"

"A couple were initially defensive, apparently fearful their gravy train here might be under threat from me or some replacement accounting firm. With one exception, the accountant handling the salmon boats and Monterrey processing plant, I felt comfortable at the end. He on the other hand will require closer scrutiny of at least the company records. Potentially, by Carole's '45 to '48 numbers, this is perhaps the largest money-spinner and as the income and expenditures all vary because of changing daily or weekly market prices for the product - well, a million here or there seems rather fluid to me. In summary - each one, except the salmon guy, on their own mentioned some version of, 'the thing missed most is the twice a year gatherings where Senior brought them all to a central location and for two or three days they brain-stormed on various aspects of the businesses'. That is an interesting self-offered comment to me."

Mr Campbell – a courier is on the way

The pause was John Henry's indication it was now his turn.

"There is a parallel with the salmon accountant, because while I only by chance kept that attorney for my own call, only he made me dig back to my five years with the San Diego DA's office for investigative skills. The rest were easily interrogated, and as with the accountants, each attorney seemed pleased to hear from 'a living, breathing soul' as one put it to me. And I agree of course about the sole proprietorship status; that ends a fruitless search for more stock certificates and frankly I am mostly pleased about this. There was one question asked of me which has no answer as far as I know; the attorney handling the various commercial building investments - mostly in shopping areas - asked me what he should do with a title paper he has been holding since January 1949. Carole, in your studies of the files, does 3,000 acres of farm land someplace west of Stockton and Lodi ring any bells?"

"Not at all."

"Well, apparently Senior paid something over three million late in '48 for what appears to be a well-managed ranch property. There are several active tenants, they pay annual leases, and the bulk of this land is in truck farming. The title in Senior's name came through after his death and I am assured all taxes have been paid annually and the income has been included in that accountant's continued handling of the land-oriented assets. I suggested he await further instruction about the title, because this was the first time it occurred to me *each* of the physical properties, of which there may be dozens, will have their own title in Senior's name and we'll have to sort through that."

"Excuse me John Henry," I began. It was quite unusual for me to even open my mouth in these sessions.

"Yes Bobby?" with a quizzical look.

"Last evening, when I discovered the check books, there was an undated check stub for \$3,200,000 that would have been late in '48; possibly November and as we do not have the cancelled checks for December 1948, well, you did say 3,000 acres; does that in your mind correspond to three point two perhaps?"

“Around \$1,000 an acre? That might be it. I’ve asked the attorney for copies of some papers, including the sale agreement supporting the property, and title.”

There would be five for dinner, much to Gracie’s pleasure, as we would be using the seldom visited dining hall; five did almost fit into the kitchen alcove, but it would have been cramped for the multi-course meal planned. I had never eaten in the dining hall personally and because it was not a room one walked through in transit to other bottom floor areas, had perhaps only once ventured. The room reflected pure California 19th century down to the authentic Conestoga wagon wheel modified into a chandelier suspended by heavy chains. The meal would last nearly two hours, with Carole at the head of the 12-seat table and me on her immediate left, thereby allowing my weighty leg to extend into the surrounds. Eventually Carole led the conversation to ‘after we have the history straightened out, do either of you have an interest in taking Bobby and I on as fulltime clients?’ It was probably the ‘Bobby and’ portion that slowed down Marie, so John Henry led the responses. Of course both harbored the hope this would transpire, although neither dared seem too anxious about the subject. I was bemused, on advanced cue from Carole, and would be held responsible for helping her analyze their postures and answers when we later retired to our room.

Next day, Thursday, could have come to a halt shortly following lunch; all of the accountants and all but two of the Orinda or San Diego-origin attorney and firm calls had been successfully completed. Carole had chosen this end-of-work period to mention a couple of, as she prefaced, ‘legally explosive bombs into the mix, just to give you something to carry away in your minds’.

“When Hilda and John Caldecott dropped in here back on Sunday the 25th of October, they left behind a series of signed documents which will primarily be of interest to John Henry. They are here” and from a folder she kept locked up in our bedroom, several pieces of paper changed hands. The attorney read each twice, passing them on to Marie after glancing to Carole to see if she objected to sharing them; Carole merely nodding her approval. John Henry said nothing until Marie had digested the contents.

Mr Campbell – a courier is on the way

“Carole, setting aside some of the language might not be identical to how I or my office perhaps would have worded the documents, they are legally binding and of everything revealed to me since my Tuesday arrival - especially the way you broke through the barrier with the Reno bank account - this tops them all!” And he paused, showing no sign of saying more.

Marie had a different take and reaction. “Carole, did either your mother or father have any idea what they were signing here?”

Carole’s answer was classic Carole Ann. “This household, with them gone virtually all of the time, requires a wide range of agreements between me and one or both of them. John Senior taught me to CYA - cover your you-know-what - and from age 13 or so, mostly living here alone or on occasion with my older sister, this is how it has evolved. Did they carefully read each document? Did they take suitable time to understand what the documents do in a legal sense? I do not know. But with John Henry’s verification, here is my summary.

“If anything should happen to either of them, whether while off in South America or any time into the future, their interest in all family assets immediately passes to me personally. And if either or both happen to have operative wills that state to the contrary, the dating on these documents supersedes such wills, unless of course one is created later than these documents. And in addition to that, anytime either are not actually in-abode here, I and I alone have their Power of Attorney to conduct any and all of our affairs in their name. Have I misstated that John Henry?”

A broad smile crossed his face before answering. “Marie told me over dinner with Scotty of her discussion concerning your accounting skill level and you pointing out that at one percent simple interest, a three hundred million dollar estate creates \$3,000,000 in annual income - leading to your questioning *why* would you accept a \$30,000 year job. I was infatuated by that answer and had I not previously been exposed to this story, my next reaction would be to offer you a position in our law firm ‘the day you obtain your law degree’. I believe I do not require a response from you!”

Carole was satisfied; she now had verification of her handiwork to deal with any eventuality involving her parents. I could see the numbers

clicking in her mind; 25 Carole + 25 Hilda + 25 John Junior equalled 75 percent. 'Her' would after April 20th never get beyond her trust-limited 25% resource and if something happened in the interim while the parents were away - well 25 + 25 still beat Her's 25. John Senior had taught his granddaughter the finer points of five-card stud and like everything else she had challenged in life, few would be better at the game, even if she never actually sat down to play a hand.

"It is only 2:30. There is one more place or thing to share with you. I could detect Marie's confusion concerning Senior's favorite hobby or passion; ham or amateur radio. You have both been told his will deeded to me personally 50 acres which we call 'hilltop' and all of the structures and what they contain. You have also heard Ben Campbell and I mention something we referred to as 'W6HD'. And John Henry, you asked me at one point 'is my deed to the tram of any interest to you here' and I indicated no. May I take you both to the hilltop for a tour? I believe you will enjoy the short trip, and in our probable future together, it would be good if you have had this adventure."

Neither objected; however, Marie appeared nervous as we stood next to the Senior- designed and built four-seat tram car. "This goes where?" she asked with obvious tension in her voice.

Carole explained, placed me where my dragging leg would not be too much of a barrier to our two guests and we were away; 90 seconds from bottom to top, during which Marie held tightly first to a support bar and at the end John Henry's arm. The dense foliage cleared only in the final 25 yards of travel and there suddenly it became apparent we were not only 'much higher up', but in fact there was a different-world impression.

The fenced-in property, masses of steel and wooden towers laced with what may have appeared to be a corner on the world's wire and aluminum supply, totally distorted the real impression for a few minutes, until Carole rather purposefully led them - with me lingering behind holding my wooden friends - to a slightly elevated front deck on the adobe building's west side. The day was fog-free, and as Hilda Marie would exclaim over and over again, 'You can actually see from above the Golden Gate and

Mr Campbell – a courier is on the way

Marin County easily down to past Palo Alto. Those islands out past Frisco - the Farrollans? - I believe I could see them as well. What a magnificent spot to build a home someday!

If the exterior views were impressive to Marie, and John Henry who said far less in reaction, the exact reverse happened when Carole opened the first door to W6HD.

"I have visited a number of radio stations - never have I seen so much equipment so skillfully arranged!"

Pure Carole reaction; "*This* is one of three almost identical rooms."

It was my duty to explain to the visitors what ham radio was all about. "Talk to somebody far away Bobby," Carole urged and I did just that; in less than a minute with Marie and John gasping at the apparent ease involved I - we - were in direct communication with somebody named Bert living in Sydney, Australia. I asked him all of the usual ham radio discussion topics - his weather, his equipment, band-conditions and one not normally discussed - his age. At the end it would be Marie who in fact seemed most taken by the entire experience.

"That *call* to Sydney was one, not prearranged, and two, cost what to make?"

I explained the total random nature of most ham contacts, short of having a prearranged schedule and to her total shock revealed 'it was free; no charge other than for the original investment in the equipment'. I had kept the contact brief but as we signed-off, using the usual ham radio numbers, the receiver stayed silent only for a few seconds; immediately there were several, perhaps a dozen, other stations calling W6HD and from their call signs, as I turned the receiver off, could tell John Henry and Marie "they were people spread from Australia to Indonesia and Japan."

"Shouldn't you have answered them?" asked the attorney.

"No obligation to do so; remember the random nature of all of this."

"Not rude to ignore them?" asked Marie.

"Not rude and let me assure you that if I did answer their calls, this would continue for many hours. Carole wanted me to demonstrate the hobby and I have done so. Any more questions?"

Marie started and John Henry finished the same one. "How do you ... get a license to do this? Is the license expensive?"

Carole knew when all her points had been made and she also briefly opened the door to her hilltop room where, as always, six or more complex jig-saw puzzles were in process. Marie believed she saw symbolism between Carole's puzzle-passion and the unique human mind she was slowly accepting as real, not make-believe puppet theater. All of this was the impression Carole intended for the hilltop visit to make and as a long term result, there would be no more blank stares when W6HD was mentioned in the future.

Everyone understood Scotty planned to once again take Marie and John Henry out for dinner and as both needed to be at the San Francisco airport by 9AM Friday he additionally volunteered to make the trip. Not having to deal with morning commuter traffic into The City seemed more than acceptable to Carole. As we resumed seated positions in the tram for the downhill run, Carole had perhaps one final subject to broach.

"John Henry, when you are changing my stock certificates, how much extra effort would be involved in creating a new title for just one of the real estate titles?"

"This involves finances in some way?" glancing at Marie.

"None. There is one piece of property held by a single company out of the 29 businesses; I wish you to change the title on that piece of property and then cancel that particular company as it is the only asset the company holds."

"Which one?"

"The Orinda Medical Center."

The name did not register with John Henry but Marie got it instantly. "Scotty's offices?"

"Yes."

John Henry looked first at Marie and then returned to Carole. "Nothing financial here; just - a gift - so to speak?"

"Precisely that. Can it be done?"

"Of course it can but does Scotty have any idea..."

Mr Campbell — a courier is on the way

"None and I request it stay that way until the title is in my hands and Bobby and I present it to him. Can do?"

Big smiles all around. "Consider it done; about three, maybe five weeks maximum."

And we were going downhill with Marie now clutching John Henry's arm one more time.

And in fact the 90-second ride prompted one more *final subject* to ask about. We would linger in the parked tram car while she did.

"Those 3,000 acres; you said the operative attorney would be sending a copy of the purchase agreement and I assume a legal description?" The question was again directed at John Henry.

"I did; should I assume you would like to have a copy when received?"

"Yes, with some haste. Perhaps those 3,000 acres and the truck farms might suit something I have in mind. How long? A few weeks?"

"If not in my office by the end of next, I'll call him back. Keep what I receive and send you a copy to the post office box?"

"No, courier it; faster."

And other than gracious and copious thanks for their time and assistance, all of which would be invoiced to Carole - that was it; we would only briefly see either of them on Friday morning as Scotty arrived at 7:30 with John Henry for the airport commute.

Chapter Thirty-Six

Let's take Babe and Britt for a plane ride!

If somehow I believed, perhaps even expected, the tenor of life to slow down well - I would be mistaken. Carole was just approaching wound-up. I started, over our comfortable two-person Mexican dinner featuring a favorite tamale dish, to re-engage in the unpleasant subject of Acalanes. Carole was having none of that during dinner or for at least a full day.

"I have a solution," she answered "but not tonight."

"If not that - what next?"

"We need to see your parents," she began. "I've had a call or two from Britt asking about a return visit - it is the tram thing as much as anything else. And he tells me he is *slowly* - that is your father's word, not mine - bringing Babe up to the current situation. Of course he really only knew it as of four weeks ago and since then you've had your operation, we've flown to Carson City, and are just now engaging two professionals to untangle my - *our* - mess; most of which I have no intention of telling either of them at this point. But I do have a plan that involves them."

"Dare I ask what?"

"Whether you do or not my love I am going to tell you!" and she leaned forward to kiss first one and then the opposite hand, which were obligingly offered; I knew the routine now.

"I am all ears."

"About which, I pray that Andrew and Anita have *my* ear-genes, not yours, which are slightly larger than I would hope our children develop!"

"All the better to hear your every word," I responded.

"Touché! OK - Babe and Britt. Those 3,000 acres of farmland we recently discovered out in the Stockton Delta?"

Stockton Delta meant nothing to me - being the recent immigrant I was. But I did understand which property and Stockton Delta as a name could await another day.

"Go on."

"That should be extremely fertile farm-land and your father, civil engineer or not, works and has worked for firms involved in farming or as we westerners label it, ranching. True?"

"Accurate; when we lived in Ithaca he was general manager for a laboratory on behalf of something known as GLF or Grange League Federation; GLF stores in the northeast are rather unique; places where farmers shop and a source for their agricultural technical backup."

"You have no interest yourself in overseeing a 3,000-acre truck farm ranch?"

"I can barely spell it."

"Nor do I have an interest. But to get Britt out of the 8 to 5 work environment, suppose we offered him the opportunity to manage the 3,000 acres and over time to acquire some - even all of it - for he and Babe?"

I was as always totally blown away by my fiancée's insight and at the end, her generosity. "I know you are serious here, but I must ask why?"

"Family takes care of family setting aside Her, Hilda and John Junior. Your parents are models for America; hard working, dedicated middle-class human beings. All they need is a lift, a break, to move up the ladder. I am suggesting we can do that and in fact hardly even miss the 3,000 acres if in ten years it ends up being in your parent's name. Assume it is one percent of three hundred million today; in ten years it might be half or less of one percent. But in that period, Britt and Babe have become self-dependent, independent, and all we did was grant them access to a resource which neither you nor I really want anything to do with. Do you see my logic here?"

I did and if I could have stood to grasp Carole in a loving hug I would have done so. Her hands were within reach and I lavished them with moist kisses; looking up she was smiling broadly.

"I take that as a yes?"

My smile was the answer.

Let's take Babe and Britt for a plane ride!

"OK, so here is my plan. When John Henry forwards the legal description we hire Clem to take you, I, Babe and Britt on a Saturday or Sunday flight; Britt still has his pilot's license?"

I did not know and said so adding "but it was for single-engine planes and neither you nor I are getting into anything less than a D18!"

"But he could ride in the co-pilot seat and that would be fun for him! So we give Clem the information on where the property is and we see it from the air without suggesting to your parents why we are doing this. And later I ask him 'suppose that property was your responsibility to manage; what would you do with it?'"

"And let nature take its course?"

"Exactly. I am anxious to see not only the land detail from the attorney but the accountant's numbers as to what it is generating per year in actual income to us. Let me assume a number; \$300,000."

"Based upon...?"

"John Senior was a ten percent guy; if he invested in something, he anticipated a ten percent per-annum return. So \$300,000 would be about that."

"But if it is in fact \$300,000 and that represents only 1% of the total assets you - we - now hold, setting aside cash from Reno and metals in Carson City - those numbers don't calculate for me."

"You are referring to my '1% of three hundred million' example to Marie and then John Henry?"

"I am."

"Oh Bobby - there is more work to do; I can see that! Remember what I just said? 'Ten percent guy'? The *annual* income from the assets, again ignoring the Reno and Carson City assets, should be thirty million not three. I - we - could build *thirty* of our new safe rooms *each* year for the rest of our lives from that using three hundred million as a base-line. In fact, *with* the Reno and Carson City reserves - well, don't be shocked if it ends up closer to four hundred fifty. Compendia amigo?"

I did not; well, I did, but suddenly being told that without attending any more school including Acalanes or university we could coast for the

balance of our lives with something like 2.5 million dollars income each *month* - well, it was all more than my \$15 weekly Cooper family allowance could absorb. And Carole could read my face.

"I will say this only once and it is a quotation from your father; you may be 'the luckiest 15-year-old male on the face of the planet', but my love, I am the most fortunate female. What is mine is *ours* and *that* is the end of this discussion for the balance of our lives together."

I may not have accepted her statement but I did grasp her intent. 'Luckiest' or 'most fortunate'? It would be with us forever and a day.

By Sunday mid-day Carole would allow us to return to the subject of Acalanes. The OJT visits would restart Monday afternoon, and while I had us prepared for the coming week and in most classes a few weeks beyond that, Carole was showing a renewed resistance to even that much. As she said several times in an off-handed way without directly addressing the topic; "I find it very difficult to return to a school curriculum which sooner than later we know we will abandon." *She* knew this; *I* was still wrestling with the topic and most of all, facing my mother and telling her 'I am *never* going back to school again!' Before the mid-November sun had set on Sunday the 15th I would reveal this concern to my fiancée.

"Because she is a school teacher and education is her life?" she asked.

I had to admit that was the core of my concerns.

"Then we re-educate her; she thinks of school as a passport to future success; my - our - task is to show her that if one starts out with assets, school is actually a handicap. I can do that."

That I had any doubt about Carole's abilities was a tarnish on our relationship so instantly I knew not to go there. And I did not.

"So what do we do about the OJT visits restarting tomorrow?"

"You call; you are the one with the mending ankle and it was you who handled this a week ago. Say this: 'Carole and I are joining her parents in Argentina, to leave this week. Please collect the workbook assignments and tests through the break for Christmas and we will take them with us'. That's it; if we are not here, we are home free."

"And after the return to school in January?"

Let's take Babe and Britt for a plane ride!

"We will *not* return - at least until mid-April. Anyone who ends up in Argentina is gone forever; *trust me!*"

"And in January?"

"I arrange a telegram to the school. Simple and effective. As far as I am concerned, school is for upwardly mobile people, which *we* are not!" Seventy-eight million in cash plus Carson City's gold and silver was speaking here.

"And Babe?"

"Leave her to me; when she realizes the value in getting Britt away from his present employer and into their own asset, well, even if he has to commute to the Delta for a spell, she will quickly see the wisdom. Think of them as you are slowly accepting us; 'working for someone else is for *other* people!' Got it?"

I got it. Or rather I was getting it. The sheer hugeness of our assets was still not registering with me, even if Carole fully comprehended the probable numbers. "Thirty million a year?" And I instantly accepted Carole was being conservative; the real number would in fact by December 1954 exceed that and there was the unspoken notation that one Robert Britt Cooper - less the 'junior' she wished to ditch - was half-owner? How did I get here, anyhow? So I might miss a year or two of school while all of this unfolded. The ride until then would be the fantasy of my life!

Chapter Thirty-Seven

Two weeks later and flying – but not to Argentina

On Sunday November 29th, following Carole and I entertaining Britt and Babe for what was my mother's inaugural visit to 'The Hacienda' and a Gracie prepared Thanksgiving dinner - with my younger brother in tow - we were airborne; without Kenny. The legal and financial description of the 3,000 acres had finally appeared by courier just a day prior to Thanksgiving and Carole, upset with 'some attorney someplace', was not pleased. She would have preferred the Sunday trip be the prior week, but lacking the essential paperwork, it was simply not possible. She could not decide whether John Henry or an unnamed attorney in San Jose was at fault here and in fact it mattered not.

Babe's Hacienda arrival went from overwhelm to overload in record time; I judged less than five minutes from arrival, Thanksgiving Day. It would be the post-Gracie-dinner trip we four took to hilltop that sent her into very visible tears. I could not recall ever seeing my mother cry and Carole was quick to comfort both Babe and Britt; always the first to react.

It was as we stood on the hilltop that Carole suggested to Babe a very simple proposition. "If you and Britt had my assets, and a guaranteed income for life that was perhaps 100 times each *month* what you earn at the library in a *year*, how would you advise your children to spend their future lives?"

I could tell as we stood admiring the view Babe was trying to massage the numbers; her \$25,000 annual salary, which Carole knew well, 'times a hundred not just for the year but for a *single month*', finally sunk in.

"Why, with that level of income, would you even think about university?" was her initial response. Carole knew my mother better than I and the

answer was totally anticipated by my fiancée. "Attending and graduating from university is all about securing your future; that is why Britt earned a Civil Engineering degree while I attained my degree in education."

"Babe, mom. That is the subject you need to focus upon. This is the reality; Bobby and I are in the sophomore year of Acalanes, but if we stopped tomorrow for the rest of our lives together - by gene-magic we would be forced to cope with not less than thirty million dollars net income *each year*. Does that register?" It was the *key* question to Babe and by some miracle it not only registered but made sense; a woman who had struggled for her own teaching degree at a time when America was entering the depths of economic depression.

I was intrigued to see it did with Babe; more fascinated Britt was counting on his fingers, attempting to sort what he had just heard. He knew from a prior 'share and tell' with Carole she - and I - were not just wealthy, we were approaching uncommonly-rich. But in 1953 dollars, 'thirty million *a year*' was beyond his instant comprehension. He was quickly deducing that our *net* income was almost identical to the *gross* revenue of the firm he now worked for as general manager and this was the point where he lost it. It would be he, not Babe, who would lapse into dead-silence for the balance of the hilltop visit and the trip down, to the point he essentially forgot about his original interest in the tram.

Before they would depart Carole restarted the conversation, aware the tour inside W6HD had fallen largely on blind-eyes and deaf-ears; that visit would need to be repeated. Information overload had taken a toll.

"Babe, Britt; what do you have planned for either Saturday or Sunday; Sunday being my preference?" Carole already had Clem booked and he had preferred that day to Saturday.

Neither had anything in response.

"Good; Britt, have you ever co-piloted a Beechcraft D18?"

The question was so far beyond his present concentration that Carole was forced to repeat it. And then she explained how an 'air tour of the upper San Joaquin Valley Delta region' had been booked for 11AM Sunday and 'you both are invited to join Bobby and me'. If either of them actu-

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ally understood her invitation, I doubted it. In fact it would be Friday when Babe would call to reconfirm what they *thought* they heard and Carole re-asked them to be at the 'Walnut Creek Aerodrome by 10:45 Sunday morning'.

The air trip was essentially a non-event. We flew over, around, and close to the 3,000-acre property and it would be Britt who made the only cogent observation; 'whoever farms that is in one of the best ag regions I have ever seen; imagine what that must generate in annual revenues!'

After the flight, which also included thirty minutes over the adjacent regions of Stockton and Lodi, Carole took Britt aside while Babe and I talked about future schooling. I was not shocked, but a bit surprised to hear her ask me "Why do you and Carole even bother with the balance of high school?" I decided to defer the answer; one step at a time. But the conversation between Carole and Britt was far more important.

"Britt," she began, "that acreage you commented upon? Bobby and I own it."

Britt stared at her blankly; it was beyond his assimilation.

"I inherited this from my grandfather, which he purchased for three point two million and in fact today's air tour was to introduce you - I mean you Britt Cooper - to the possibility that you become full-time manager of what amounts to 3,000 acres of income-producing land."

"Carole? This is a bit much for me all at once. You - and my son you say - own that acreage?"

"I - we do. The *we* part of course depends upon April 20th's wedding, but you should understand there is already a legal document in existence which makes Bobby my full partner, less marriage."

"And you are saying to me 'Britt Cooper this - 3,000-acre parcel', owned by you two, is being offered to me to manage?"

"I am saying that; at *double* your present PPA salary."

"You know what my salary is?" It would not startle him to learn she did.

"I do not and whatever it is, this property generates for Bobby and I not less than \$300,000 a year in income. So subtract double-your-salary

and that is what the net to your son and me will be if you accept my - our - offer.”

“But \$300,000 a year is what you now receive. Why would you reduce that by paying me \$70,000 a year, which is double my present salary, just to oversee it?”

“Two reasons. The first is *Family*. I - we - cover Family first. The second is with your full- time attention, I believe the property will return to your son and me more than the present \$300,000 a year. You now know the numbers; all you have to do is go to work to make my prophecy come true!”

“Carole, I will need to discuss this with Babe...”

“You can begin managing here as soon as you are out from under your present employment contract. Oh yes - one more aspect to this.”

“I am ashamed to admit I cannot imagine something in addition to doubling my present salary.”

“Try this on for size. This property was purchased by John Senior in late 1948. Imagine how, by say not later than 1963, and I hope much sooner, you and Babe *own* this; all 3,000 acres. Neither Bobby nor I have any long-term interest in this property so if you can build the asset value, I will agree here and now to sell it to you and Babe, when you are ready, for the original John Senior purchase price.”

“Three point two million?” Britt’s regular conversations did not of course toss around numbers such as ‘three point two million’ so he was on unplowed ground here. Carole and I had long ago dropped anything but the first significant digits when discussing money matters. Britt was slowly adopting our language; a good indicator to Carole.

“You have my word on that and as your future daughter-in-law and the mother of your grandson and granddaughter I do not offer that lightly!”

Britt, which Babe and I could not help but observe even if we could not hear the conversation, essentially collapsed, grasping Carole in a hug that bordered beyond daughter-in-law. Babe would comment to me “Is Carole enticing your father?”

Babe would call Carole, not me, after they returned home, as did we to The Hacienda, to express her total admiration for both the Caldecott fam-

Two weeks later and flying – but not to Argentina

ily and the offer. She was, on behalf of Britt, basically saying 'Of course we will do that!'

Carole had us past Acalanes, past Babe and Britt and someplace in all of the conversation she had secured both Britt and Babe's promise 'we will proudly attend your marriage on April 20th!' Life with this amazing individual was never going to lack excitement.

Chapter Thirty-Eight

Feliz Navidad

It would be Christmas Eve 1953 I would recall in later years; a double-entry night because first my final ankle cast would be gone and secondly because Carole actually suggested 'we sit and watch color TV'. In fact, from my first over-night on September 11th until now, I had not even seen a television set glowing at me. Nor of course had I yet witnessed color TV. By this point my weekly *Broadcasting Magazine*, restarted by Carole, was arriving and she understood while I may have been diverted from the spark of following the development of the telecasting industry, it had not disappeared from my mind. She quickly become an avid reader of BT's radio-section and determined it placed her one step-ahead of Stan at KWBR on trends in the broadcast music world. This was one of many, many things we shared in common and hardly a challenge to our time together; in fact, quite the opposite. *Broadcasting* reports quickly became a focal point of our weekly discussions and it did not take much more than a week - perhaps two - before she was routinely on the telephone with Stan to quiz him about something she had gleaned from 'the Bible of Broadcasting'.

Christmas Day was an event planned for 1016 Sunnybrook; Britt would begin management of the 3,000 acres shortly after the New Year holiday period and Carole had already created a weekly pay system for his salary and arranged a vehicle for his use in managing the Delta property. One of her first suggestions - make that requirement - was to engage a firm to create a hardened runway where a D18 could land and take off on the property. Britt was not initially pleased with losing thirty acres of productive land for an airplane strip but eventually came around as we all did when Carole had her mind preset. Indirectly, between the Contra Costa Library employing Babe

and the 3,000-acre spread engaging my father, we were responsible for my parents. It would be months before I sorted it out in my mind.

On instruction, as the temporary darkroom facility was completing, I was banned from what was previously a daily inspection routine; 'no fair peeking' was not only Carole's verbal instruction, but a hand-printed sign appeared on the new outer door should I in fact be tempted. My own Christmas problem was more challenging; what do you gift a girl who controls hundreds of millions of dollars and can arrange for virtually any object that attracts her interest with a brief telephone call? Once I was past that stress, a bigger one became evident. House-bound, with crutches, or at the end simply a heavy cast, and basically only exiting The Hacienda when we left together, how would I even get out shopping? Any *real* Carole Christmas-level present had to be something no store would stock anyhow. In a flash of inspiration I enlisted Babe's help.

"Bobby, I am slowly coming to terms with Carole's vast range of skills and interests, but, you want my help finding *what* for her? Say it again."

"A necklace - custom made by someone - starting with a gold colored and in fact real gold woven string - although I doubt in this case *string* is the correct terminology."

"I have that much but the next part - what you wish strung on the string or chain? Surely I heard wrong?"

"Buffalo teeth; genuine teeth from a dead Buffalo, preferably a male Buffalo in case there is an option here."

"Ugh! You are asking dear Carole to place dead Buffalo teeth around her neck and on her chest? Surely son you have not thought this one out very well! Carole does not strike me as a dead-Buffalo-tooth kind of girl."

"Mom, an abbreviated story of which dad has no knowledge, so for the moment please keep this between us. And before I start, Britt is scheduled to stop here on the way back to Lafayette this evening and I'll send a drawing I made of the necklace you can use to locate a suitable jeweller. And the story..."

I intended to condense Carson City to two minutes; it lasted seven, broken only by her gasps and 'oh-my-goodness' responses.

"How many million again in gold?"

Feliz Navidad

"We may never know accurately and there is silver and even diamonds stored there; but for our personal discussion, call it fifty."

"Say it for me again, with dollars attached."

"Fifty million *dollars* in value is the present estimate."

The pause stretched and stretched. "And it belongs to Carole? My goodness son, you *do* know how to pick a wife!"

"Actually mom, and you've heard this before, Carole picked me. If there is any credit to be taken, it should be you and Britt for creating and raising me to a standard which attracted Carole Ann Caldecott!"

"So in Nevada, inside an ore-cart being used as a safety deposit box, a bag of male Buffalo teeth? Why can't you simply arrange those shipped down here rather than sending me on a treasure-tooth hunt?"

I explained that part, having skipped it previously. "Only Carole, or I, can open the ore cart and neither of us will be in Carson City before Christmas. If there is one set of male Buffalo teeth, surely someone as clever as you can locate another set here in the Bay Area?"

"Is there a budget? I hesitate to ask such a question, understanding what I do about Caldecott assets."

"No budget - whether it turns out to be \$500 or \$5,000 matters not a whit. What is most important is that it not look like something you would see on offer at Kresge's 5 and 10. I have put all of this on the drawing and instructions I'll send home with dad. It is now November 30th, so you need to start on this immediately, please?"

"Will you wait until you both are here to present it? I cannot even imagine her reaction and seeing it firsthand would mean much to me."

"No promises, but I'll try to do that. And thank you for helping here; I'm rather house-bound as you know and we only leave here as a twosome, which reduces my opportunity of arranging on my own."

She was not quite done with the subject. "Bobby, about your allowance?"

That would be the \$15 each week number. "Yes mother?"

"I deposit \$15 into your B of A checking account weekly. I don't believe your projected cost for Carole's necklace will be covered by your present balance."

"I will pay all costs myself mother; but not from that account."

"What am I missing here? You have another account as well?"

"Actually yes I - we - do. There is essentially no number you can create for the necklace which I cannot cover with a check," but I did not reveal - 'unless of course it exceeds 78 million!'

"'We' means you and Carole?"

"It does; just for the record, at Wells Fargo Bank."

"Oh - so this has something to do with the horde of gold, silver and diamonds you found in Nevada?"

Babe was pushing here and I was uncertain how far to push back. "Mom, it has nothing to do with the ore mining cart resource. Carole maintains a Caldecott operational account at a different Wells Fargo branch and I am a signatory on that."

"So if the necklace you are requesting costs, say \$5,000, you can write a check for that amount?" She was possibly disturbed her son was biting off too large a bite; it was the Marie-mom thing, only this time it was closer to home for me.

My answer would be factual but inexact. "Mom, every month the account I can write checks on grows by one million dollars. You have already learned something about how significant Carole's resources are; do you really believe for a minute I would be here on the phone with you authorizing spending whatever-it-costs without being conscious of a way to pay for the necklace?"

"You can sign checks on an account that increases by a million dollars each *month*?"

"Carole and I actually live a rather frugal life; one of our weekly challenges is what to do, how to invest, the money she receives, which we cannot in good conscience spend. Do you see it better now?"

"I want to be clear here, son. This has nothing to do with the 50 million dollars you discovered in an ore cart in Nevada? You write checks on another account that grows each month by a million dollars - totally separate from the ore cart?"

"Mother dear, before you ask me, if I was forced to use a calculator to tell you how much money Carole and I have as assets right this minute it

would take me perhaps eight hours to work through the numbers and at the end my answer would be accurate only to plus or minus ten - that is ten *million* dollars."

The pause was so long I thought she had either expired or the telephone had failed. "I will never ask you again about money, but do you object if I stop depositing \$15 weekly into your personal account?"

I did not. And I had avoided explaining seventy-eight million in our joint account. I may not have yet reached 16 years, but if there were some subjects one did not discuss with their own mother, this was one.

It was a start and within two days Babe located several tooth collections and had called every custom jeweller in Contra Costa County; all four of them! Her position at the library was proving immensely helpful and ultimately she would decide on a hobbyist jewellery maker who happened to live within walking distance of 1016 Sunnybrook. He and I would become telephone-friends shortly.

Plan-B involved Britt and when he left for home after a thirty-minute meeting with Carole, in a small canvas bag were five gold coins and another of my drawings. My concept was a wall plaque with all five pieces mounted to form the letter 'C' and a single engraved line on a gold block mounted below; 'The 100K Club'. He of course did not grasp the engraving at first, leading to me explaining '*each* of these coins has a collector value of at least \$20,000; five times that is \$100,000.' Which made him instantly very nervous; "These *five* coins are equal to three years of my present salary?"

I hadn't put those numbers together until he did. "Yes, but only one and-half years with your new Delta Ranch salary," was my quick comeback.

"Someday will you or Carole or both of you explain to me where these came from?"

"A minting facility in San Francisco."

"No, I mean more than that; another one of John Senior's *leftovers*?"

I was not ready to be drawn into a Carson City conversation, knowing Carole was waiting to walk him to the car. And I suspected, later verified, Babe would slowly dribble out my earlier conversation that began with the subject of Buffalo teeth.

"I'm on my own here; correct?"

"You are and there is no budget limit; just make sure the woodwork, mounting, and gold engraved identification plaque are worthy of the coins' value."

"Exquisite rather than budget?"

"Yes sir - we wouldn't want to disappoint Carole now, would we!" I thought my father was doing a commendable job of accepting his new employer was not yet 16 - and a girl. But this didn't seem like something we should discuss at this time.

It all came into place before December 20th and of course I remained blocked from entering the new interim darkroom. Many large boxes, even wooden crates, had arrived to George's care prior to the 10th; knowing Carole as I did, I now expected full-color Kodachrome and a bench filled with state-of-the-art enlargers to greet me when finally allowed entrance. I would not be disappointed. The vault cum family-safe-room had run into some snags; the massive vault door was being custom built in Sacramento, the air purifiers and radiation detection systems were on backorder and the contractor showed his angered correspondence with the suppliers to Carole and I, noting, 'It is this damned Cold War thing; suddenly the demand for this specialized equipment using rare metals is far greater than the supply and the war in Korea has not helped'. Carole shared her own projection of completion - a topic because she had one of her not-yet-revealed creative plans to transfer the ore cart from Carson City. 'It will be after February 1st, still plenty of time, but I recognize the skill and care the contractor is taking; let's you and I get busy with some sketches for the indoor pool room!'

There would be only one unexpected interruption to the Christmas weekend period, a collect telephone call originating from Argentina on Christmas Eve. Gracie answered it, being totally confused even if her Spanish was the equal of the South American operator, and finally locating Carole in our bedroom where we - with great excitement - had been opening stocking-presents.

"Carole - our charge card limit has been exceeded; call the bank and arrange \$100,000 to the card account as soon as they open on Monday."

No 'how are you' or 'Merry Christmas' or 'love and kisses from mom and dad' - it was John Junior on the connection with simply 'send money fast!' Carole answered "I will handle that" and she paused to hear "Bye" followed by a loud squeal.

Setting the Bell handset back on the cradle she turned to me repeating the full conversation; all 14 seconds of it. "It will come out of their personal accounts!" was her only comment. Two months would pass before we heard again from Argentina.

Carole insisted she present the interim-darkroom to me immediately after Gracie's Christmas morning breakfast and waiting for her at the table, courtesy of George who had kept the package hidden for nearly a week, was the C-format mahogany piece with five vintage pre-1853 gold coins Britt had arranged. Carole was totally overcome, while Gracie and George watched silently from the kitchen as she cried, laughed, and slapped me on the hand for nearly two minutes. "It goes in our bedroom!" she finally decided; "'C' works for Caldecott *and* Cooper; brilliant". The Buffalo Tooth necklace would wait under the Cooper tree with Babe teetering on complete loss of self-control as Carole unwrapped the - to her - unexpected extra-present from her soon-to-be husband.

Each of the five by the tree on Sunnybrook would have a different reflection of what happened when Carole slowly removed the gold-colored paper plus purple bow and all of these would memory-linger with us through Babe and Britt's great-grandchildren and for one additional generation our own. Babe's recollection feared 'you were going to have intimate relations right there on the floor - in front of Kenny, your brother'; it apparently being my brother and not she and Britt that concerned her. Britt's version was totally focussed on the way Carole gently lifted the necklace from the carefully selected hinged jeweller's box and in total initial silence unbuttoned the top two buttons of her blouse, lifting her raven hair to ask me, 'Please slide it on for me, love!' By now, a 4.0 at manipulating nursing-bra clasps, I could do that!

My most potent memory would come six-hours later when we returned to our bedroom and this reflection would *not* be shared with children or

grandchildren. Carole's post-'53 memory would expand upon on the origin of the necklace, the Carson City treasure trove, and the total amusement when she and I discovered male-Buffalo-teeth listed as an asset bag. My ten-year-old brother would have the least accurate memory; 'Can I try it on?' he asked of Carole. Her response, which I clearly recalled, was 'not now, not *ever* Kenny'.

Chapter Thirty-Nine

Life in the slow lane

Immediately post New Year's Eve, which we celebrated solo after turning down invitations from my parents and Scotty, based in part on the 28th fifth anniversary date of John Senior's death, I returned to an attempt to be busy working through the school workbooks and creating papers in both of our names, knowing fully nobody might ever review any of this work. Carole left me to do this largely because she was totally immersed in finances, planning, and hour-long meetings with Britt while they worked out the 'most profit-oriented use of 3,000 acres'. As it turned out, there were nine separate farmers renting or leasing portions of the *Delta Ranch* - the name Carole selected - and Britt was urging Carole to revise those agreements to maximize around 1,000 acres, which he believed should be used for rice cultivation, located as they were adjacent to the lower swamp tidal basin. Barely 100 acres was currently used for rice but the dependable water source and predictable weather patterns suggested to him 'profits from that section could easily double'. As with virtually everything else Carole tackled, she was not only a fast learner, but within a week a step or two ahead of my father perhaps half the time. He was more than happy to accept this; she was beyond being merely his boss; Carole was his almost daughter-in-law.

"Rings," she interrupted me buried in one of the most boring history texts I had ever encountered.

"Rings what?" I answered.

"Wedding rings; remember? I asked you to remind me and you have not, so I've come to you on this one. What are your thoughts?"

I had given it some thought, although not much. The 200-plus carats of 'blue-white' diamonds hiding in a canvas bag still in Carson City was my

only real focus; when you are in danger of being literally buried by hundreds of pounds of gold and silver, it is difficult to become excited by either. And a Buffalo Tooth ring did seem inappropriate even if, as she stood there, her Christmas present was gracing a tauntingly unbuttoned blouse which, as was her in-house custom, dangled between unsupported breasts.

"Well there are those diamonds..."

"I am not a flaunting person, you know that. Remember as you once told me, 'I stand at the *back* of the crowd passing out five-dollar bills'. And the unknown quantity or look of the gemstone bag is not interesting either. Come on hubby, be more expansive!"

"Well, we could have a 19th century gold piece melted down to create basic single band rings?"

"Closer, but I also want an engagement band and this is what brought me in here at this moment; it occurs I should be wearing one; *now*. So come on - more imagination!"

"Twin single gold wedding bands, silver engagement band for you?"

"All from Carson City stock; is that the concept?"

I knew instantly I was being led; the same way my father taught me to lead a Brook trout in a stream to a fly-cast lure. "Something like that."

"My reaction? The look of one each silver and gold is, well, not what I wish to wear to my grave. And two of either also misses the image I would prefer. More creative; come on Bobby!"

"I am stumped," as indeed I was.

"Try this; you are starting from the hoard soon to be in our family-safe room; forget about that as a resource for a moment. How about platinum and silver, which in fact do go together rather nicely; I have some photos to show you," and they magically appeared from inside her half-buttoned blouse, briefly revealing her tender-points.

And it would promptly be settled as Carole headed off to call a jeweller indirectly located through her ham radio Red Book. Over the next few days we would endure four visits by not one but three separate wanna-be jewellers to The-Caldecotts and in each session Carole and I would be subjected to a 'show and tell' that usually lasted far too long. 'Diamonds are a

heritage-forever stone,' one insisted and proceeded to start an education for us to-be-weds on the 'age-old beauty of blue-white', while explaining the term was no longer in favor, but the diamond would always be. I caught a sharp glance towards me from Carole; a warning not to even suggest we possibly possessed more blue-whites than he had in stock in his business. There was no need of course; flaunting was hardly a Caldecott tradition and while Carole's last name would become Cooper, Caldecotts were also forever too.

Our ring finger sizes taken after we - Carole in fact - selected both the jeweller and the designs, we would by early February hold an engagement-party, ending with my placing the platinum band on her left hand. Actually, that was not the-end; more like the beginning, because *this* party was in our bedroom, while both of us sat buck naked on the super-sized bed. Some actions may not have lasted forever, but a select few would be recalled forever-and-a-day. This was destined be one of those.

Shortly after ring ordering, Carole asked me "Why are you wasting time on the school work?" She didn't require an explanation, nor did I. We both understood officially we were in Argentina and Acalanes had erased our names from the active roll.

"Suggest an alternative; I do on perhaps rare occasions add to the sum of my knowledge but frankly my dear - it is unusual."

"Take these sketches we have done together for the indoor swimming pool and let your mind wander. Our contractor will be finishing the safe-room within weeks and I'd like to move him on rather than releasing to someone else."

"Help me here; I know a permanent darkroom is part of the plan and of course the pool and area around it; what else do you envision?"

"Picnic area with indoor barbecue, built-in permanent shuffle board area, room for ping-pong table, an abundance of lounging space, transparent roof for a section so the abundant sun pours through, a wall-length indoor garden and ventilation or air conditioning because, as you will discover, this is a very hot place in the summer; not ostentatious, but very roomy. I want to do this one time only and have space for Andrew and Anita's friends to gather here as they grow up. And the pool?"

"Yes - what about it?"

"Big. Not huge, but big, with a gradual slope so the children can splash at an early age and as they progress with their water skills move into deeper water. And it goes without saying, heated for all year use."

"Diving board?"

"Of course, and I realize that says the deep-end needs to support diving. Come on hubby, get with it. Shower me with sketches and ideas. Oh yes, those color photos you did yesterday of me at work are magnificent; I expect Andrew and perhaps Anita will be captured by your skills in processing photographs!"

I knew better than to even approach the subject of pool cost; the safe-room would end up at slightly over 1.1 million, but that would include all of the apparatus to support six people for three months in total isolation from the world.

"Anything else?"

"Remember, while we seldom have used it, there is already a gymnasium here, so no point in duplicating that area. Oh yes, one thing I just recalled. Britt's birthday is February first - yes?"

"It is; we did miss Babe's back in October; I believe you would not have known this at the time; we were too busy getting acquainted!"

"Britt first; what do we give him?"

"You mean other than a thoughtful card?"

"Stuffing a card full of cash is one option, but surely we can be better than that."

"He keeps getting stuck with his station wagon on the Delta Ranch property and cannot really go all over it without using the old World War Two Jeep stored there; how about one of the British Land Rover four-wheel drives?"

"Replacing the Chevy wagon?"

"He possibly doesn't need two and from what I have read the Land Rover is way ahead of anything the American car makers currently offer."

Carole was silent for a moment; a sign she was considering the options.
"You said British - yes?"

"I did."

"Problem one - locating a source, two - service and parts could be iffy. And three - the corker to me - right hand drive?"

I was instantly caught out and embarrassed. "Oh my - of course, plus from what I have read, they are more suited to off-road than highway driving and Britt would be using it to commute. OK - not a Land Rover!"

"No, but the concept is good; maybe the WWII Jeep merely needs to be upgraded with something newer and left there for his use; we do have those buildings for a shop and your dad is already sketching better use of them. All we are trying to do here is provide a way to navigate the acreage without spending hours each week being stuck in the mud; yes?"

"That's it and the old Jeep would be mostly fine, except for the commuting part and the near-daily maintenance to keep it operating."

"You go back to researching this and we'll revisit. On the subject of vehicles, you and I need to do something, soon, about preparing for our own driver licenses. We should have done this sooner, but because of your leg cast I put it away and am just now being reminded."

"I know nothing about the requirements or procedure."

"I do and have had the material since October. First we need to register for a professional driver-ed class; I will arrange that immediately. This will require 40 verified hours of driving with an instructor and my quick math says 10 hours a week for four weeks takes us until around the first of March. Unfortunately, that only achieves a restricted license which limits us in many ways. The details are many, but none of it starts until we do the course. Are you up to 10 hours weekly for a month?"

Anything would be an improvement to completing school workbook pages nobody would ever see. "There are times when not using George would be convenient. Alright - lead the way and I will follow!"

Carole smiled deeply, massaged my hands and left the room with a single additional comment. "And then we can put some actual mileage on that Corvette!"

January was, at least for me, a peaceful, coasting time. I would recall the ease with which life had been progressing before the start of March.

But in my idle mind time, while exerting useless labor on school texts destined never to be graded, I had been having new Carole-like thoughts. First was the seventy-eight million sitting in our joint Wells Fargo checking account. Talking with Ben Campbell in Reno, after introducing myself with my ham radio call-sign and moving on to being Carole Caldecott's fiancé, we discussed the rate of interest Wells Fargo had been paying on the master account of more than seventy million and the interest-on-interest account of seven million; now both largely residing in our joint checking account in Lafayette's Wells Fargo. His answer was both shocking and a challenge. "Back when Senior created these accounts the rate of interest was under 2%; because of the inputted amount each month I elected, against home-office advice, to allow a 4% interest rate. You lost that rate on the amount transferred to Lafayette." Actually, Lafayette was paying just 0.5% on the seventy-eight million; it would end up earning under \$400,000 for 12 months; so drastically below Senior's original ten-percent-guy base that I was alarmed.

"I believe Carole and I need to come in for a visit; we need a proper education," I suggested. "Better still, I come to W6HD and we can get two things done at one time!" was his response and so it would be, but not until May.

Number two was my passion for all things electronic. 1954 had launched as a banner year for rapidly accelerating advances as the Bell Lab creation of the transistor in 1948 was finally having an impact in the real world. Add to this the approach of stereo sound and low-cost two-way personal radio and - well - it was difficult for me to justify our 0.5%, or even 4%, interest-bearing funds when, if properly invested in new technology, a much larger return could be anticipated. This would become the foundation for my lifelong contribution to the ever-growing asset value of the Caldecott-Cooper marriage. Not quite 16 years of age was no longer an issue; more that seventy million dollars suspended essentially *idle* in a checking account would be. As Carole's mind would be diverted post our April 20th wedding, mine would be challenged to fill the vacuum.

Chapter Forty

'Safe-House' is done!

Three events coinciding on Friday February 5th virtually guaranteed a permanent cerebral memory position for both of us. First the expedited push to complete the safe-room saw the last bolts, shelving, and appliances installed. The contractor pronounced it not only done but 'the finest work I have ever done'. The last month to five weeks had been duly recorded with my cameras and he was gifted with a set of more than 50 full color photos which Carole and I subsequently feared might be tempting to use in his future marketing. And that worried Carole, who insisted the contractor sign a document agreeing 'the actual location or customer name for the facility never - ever - be released to anyone, anywhere'. That probably would not stop his employees, or their wives, from verbally sharing the information. It was an attempt; perhaps too late in fact, by Carole to remind everyone *'The Caldecotts are very private people'*. We would have an unexpected reason to be reminded of this family policy in the near term future.

The second memory event was the ring creator appearing mid-afternoon with small silken boxes; the three rings were completed and after a careful inspection by Carole she shocked the man by handing him a check on the spot asking only 'when you have time, a printed receipt please to our post office box'.

And two led us to three; our butt-naked sitting on the super-size bed engagement party around 8 that evening. The 'will you marry me' part went off without a blemish and for the next two hours we would visit every square inch of the massive bed for extended periods of time. Relations between us, as in bed and conjugal, although not always in bed, had steadily matured to a level where neither of us would ever finish without complete

satisfaction and more often than not, exhaustion. As in virtually all aspects of our lives, Carole led, but very carefully orchestrated when it was my turn. For an *amateur* with no prior experience, she was very, very good, not that I had any standard of comparison personally. Nor would I ever be tempted to chance a comparison during our sixty-plus years ahead.

Saturday morning breakfast would be delayed as we lingered during the joint shower for an unusual period of time. Neither of us had ever been quite so blissful and if she said it once, she repeated several times “73 more nights until we are legally married”; and “isn’t 73 a good amateur radio number?” Indeed it was - ‘best wishes and thank you for the contact’ was the basic ham-lingo. ‘73’ described the February 6th shower rather perfectly.

By completion of my toast and eggs and wife-to-be’s complex fresh fruit bowl, I knew we were back on track. What she did do is display not once but multiple times the engagement ring to Gracie, who in turn hugged her for extended periods. I instantly knew Gracie was going to be a perfect nanny for Andrew and Anita - when they appeared.

“Carson City,” she began as the last poached egg and toast bite was heading into my mouth; Carole’s timing was usually spot-on. “Here is my plan; give me your feedback. One of Senior’s dearest ham friends is named John Bradley. I believe you have been at W6HD when he was there; the one wearing the official looking police uniform. Ring a bell?”

It did.

“John, or JB as I prefer to call him, is Chief of Police in Berkeley, a former US Marine Captain; do you recall ever seeing that famous photo of soldiers raising the original flag pole on top of that mountain in Iwo Jima?”

I did; it had won a Pulitzer Prize.

“In fact there were actually six Marines raising that flag, not the four in the originally published photo; John was cropped by the newspaper that initially used it because they had only two paper columns of width and he and the fellow on the far right - JB was on the left - missed immortality by the stroke of a newspaper editor’s decision. JB has a full six-man print above his desk in Berkeley. Anyhow - I digress. John has been brought up to speed on the Carson City transport problem and quickly volunteered to

'Safe-House' is done!

assemble an ex-Marine team to meet us there. Using a military truck and wearing full uniforms, they will transport the ore cart from Carson to here and into our safe-room. Nobody in their right mind will mess with four marines in battle gear over a locked mine ore cart!"

My only possible reaction while gagging on the remaining egg white was to break out in a coughing fit and hysterical laughter. Carole's laughter joined mine, causing Gracie to peek around the alcove corner to confirm neither of us was in any kind of danger.

"My love - of all of your plans and schemes, this sounds the most outrageous of all!" I began when my tonsils were back under control. "Mister Brinks, eat your heart out!" which brought Carole into a similar, if shorter, period of hysterical laughter.

"And the best part?"

I could not guess what would be *better than* four armed marines guarding our ore cart in an official US government truck.

"The Buffalo teeth. JB asked what they would be transporting and I vaguely described it as a lifetime collection by Senior and then added 'including a bag filled with adult male Buffalo teeth'. And he laughed almost as long and hard as you just did saying 'that is the infamous Senior story that all of us hams love to share over a beer; do you know where those teeth came from?' And I told him I did not. 'They were taken off of Geronimo by a US Army Calvary Captain when the old Indian surrendered. They are in fact a part of Americana!' And you know what, Bobby?"

In complete puzzlement, once again, I did not.

"Given this knowledge, I am pleased the necklace you arranged for Christmas was not *those teeth*; they belong someplace where the public will see them along with the background of their origin," reaching to finger her own necklace, which she wore for long hours most days.

I was still digesting not only my food but the distinguished position of one John Bradley in American history; the flag on Mount Suribachi. And *be* would lead the recovery and return of John Senior's lifetime-private-collection? If Babe thought Carole's family quite unusual, this would send

her into nervous twitter, although for the moment sharing it with her, or anyone else, was the furthest thing from my conscious mind.

Carole had one more reflection to pass on. "I do not recall seeing this particular bag but JB relates Senior described it being deerskin tied with a knot at the top. It should easily be recognized when we finally open the ore cart here. I suggest you enlist the help of Babe to run down more accurate facts and then put your writing skills to work, describing how and why Geronimo might have carried on his person a bag of male Buffalo teeth at the time of his final surrender."

"And then?"

"We locate a suitable Indian museum, probably in Arizona or New Mexico, and arrange to deliver them both the bagged teeth and your researched history. This needs to be shared, not left to languish for Andrew and Anita's children to ponder about."

"We are assuming here the Senior story, via JB, is credible?"

"What choice do we have? If it is wrong, some future historian will straighten it out. Leaving it stored in our safe-room will never allow even that to happen."

February was off to a roaring start and our professional driving lessons would commence on Monday; 20 days of two hours, times two of us. By the end of the month, none of this would seem either important or memorable for quite some time into the future.

With General-Carole in charge of logistics, advance weather patterns determined we would take a two-day break from the driving lessons Monday and Tuesday; the 15th and 16th. JB and his crack Marine crew departed Contra Costa County mid-day Sunday in a six-ton US Army registered transport truck and courtesy of pilot Clem we would meet them at the Carson City Wells Fargo branch around 9AM on Monday. Our stay would be brief - just long enough to be pleasant with manager Kyle Moore who only as we landed did Carole telephone to advise "I am here for the ore cart". In my fiancée's mind, any warning beyond minutes might create a situation with Brinks and she simply planned to appear coming through the bank's front door followed by four fully battle-gear ready US Marines,

'Safe-House' is done!

even if none of them actually might be fit for youthful duty. It worked so well that Kyle felt compelled to reassure his staff, 'the Marines have *not* landed; carry on as usual'. Actually, he was guessing on the 'not landed' part. Carole was cordial but to the point; "Meet Captain Bradley and his squad; they will remove the ore cart out the rear entrance where a US Army Truck waits with a lift. I will have the cart returned to you as soon as practical" and she and I walked towards the double iron gates separating us from the massive 1860s constructed vault with Kyle wedged in between us and a quartet of burly Marines. It would only require a few minutes until the cart was rolling into the rear alley and if this had been planned as a bank robbery, it probably would have succeeded. I sniggered to myself, picturing the newspaper headline: 'Under-16 robs Wells Fargo assisted by US Marines'.

And I would have the photos to illustrate the story. Carole had located in her Bobby-Christmas-shopping a newly available miniature spy camera, half the size of a package of cigarettes with a rubber plunger cord extending to my jacket pocket. The camera clipped onto my chest pocket disguised as a non-descript brown box and using specially created film 72 mini-images could be snapped and stored. Carole's comment, when I opened it from our bedroom hung Christmas stocking display, had been simply 'this could be very helpful; you *will* find a use for it!' From the moment we landed until waving safe trip after JB and his departing squad, I would shoot all but four of the possible film images. Ten, twenty, fifty years later, several dozen of the shots in sequence would still occupy a place of honor on a special display located in the pool room just above the barbeque area. And neither Carole nor I would ever tire of retracing the step-by-step sequence, ending when we welcomed JB and the Marines home to unload the ore cart in the final four images.

At Carole's instruction, I had prepared for their return four envelopes to be presented as *thanks* after the cart was manhandled into the new safe-room. Each contained a 200-word summary of the expected successful expedition and two sentences explaining the coin inside each; 1853 US Assay Office Ten D. By the turn of the century each of these would have

a collector value in excess of \$10,000; fair pay for two days of travel and an attack on a Nevada bank that would never be recounted in any history book. It was not quite Mount Suribachi, of course, but in its limited way, no less important.

From the ore cart return, both of us would sandwich a few hours a day, together, in the safe-room, creating bag-by-bag inventories, which in turn became my responsibility to transfer from legal pad notes to permanent records. By the 26th day of February, a Friday that would *live-in-infamy* for both of us until death, we had counted approaching 20,000 coins and using a gross of storage bags from Gracie's kitchen, attempted to do a sort-by-date and mint origin. A local supply firm had delivered several dozen, later several hundred plastic trays, normally used in offices, where the properly inventoried and tagged bags would rest until some unknown and distant future date. The safe-room had appeared massive when we began but by the end of February available shelf space was dwindling rapidly. The good news was we rather quickly located the 'deerskin bag with male Buffalo teeth' and for now they simply rested in their own plastic tray. Carole had just commented on our progress when Gracie arrived at the doorway with a message.

"I believe we will at this pace have the ore cart empty by the end of the first week in March." The words were still echoing in the chamber when Gracie interrupted.

Chapter Forty-One

"Miss Carole – come quick – Argentina on telephone!"

The nearest telephone was but steps away in The Library, through which one walked to gain entrance to the new vaulted facility and Carole, muttering "I don't need Argentina right now!" walked slowly to pick up the instrument. The voice she heard was neither John Junior nor Hilda.

"You are Carole Ann Caldecott and you live on El Toyonal in Orinda, state of California?" the deep American accent began.

She confirmed that, motioning me to stand close so we could share the crackly tones coming through the earpiece.

"And your mother is Hilda June Caldecott; your father is John Adam Caldecott?"

Again she confirmed the question.

"And your parents recently acquired a cattle ranch outside of Cordoba near the town of Alta Gracia?"

This time her answer was more complex. "I have been told about the ranch, I understood Cordoba, but the remainder is news to me; you did say something like 'Alta Barcia'?"

"No, the Alta is correct; Gracia is spelt G R A C I A."

"Oh, like 'Gracias Amigo'?"

"Close enough, Miss Caldecott. My name is David Johnson and I am attached to the American Embassy here in Buenos Aires. Can I assume you are of legal age and if not is an older Caldecott available?"

Carole answered "One minute please," cupping her hand over the handset talk-here end. In a low whisper she said to me, "Bobby - I have a really bad feeling here. You, my fiancé, will be the witness I handle this properly."

"Mr Johnson?" she continued. "You are speaking to someone of legal age, I am the oldest Caldecott in residence and should I be sitting down now?"

The male voice in Argentina coughed briefly, possibly wishing he was not the one placing this call. "May I simply address you as Carole?"

"It is certainly shorter; yes please."

"I will not try to disguise my reason for calling you. There has been an incident at your parents' ranch near Alta Gracia. Bandits, known as banditos here, from the nearby mountains have attacked the ranch home, one person has died and one is simply missing."

Carole now leaned against the edge of a table, wrapping her non-telephone arm around my waist. We had been physically closer many times, but seldom when fully clothed. She exaggerated slightly. "I am sitting down."

"Your father is dead, shot many times. It is your mother Hilda who is missing. It should also be noted this embassy extends our heartfelt official condolences for your loss."

Carole's reaction was instant and to me text book my fiancée. She did not pucker, did not at this instant begin sobbing or crying; rather she headed to the unknown element.

"What is your best intelligence about Hilda? Based upon whatever knowledge you have of the way banditos handle captives?"

Johnson coughed nervously; obviously he was not expecting to be quizzed about this level of detail so quickly.

"Am I allowed to be honest here?"

"I, my family, would much prefer honesty to some false hope said only to console us. Honesty, please."

"There are two possibilities at the top of the list; recovering her alive and unharmed is not one of those. According to the Cordoba police department, kidnapping for ransom is the most likely scenario. Are you sure you are comfortable with this discussion?"

"When I become uncomfortable, I will tell you."

"Yes, well - but even if a ransom is demanded and paid, the odds will be against a safe return. The ranch house was ransacked, whatever funds or

"Miss Carole — come quick — Argentina on telephone!"

other valuables your parents may have had there are either missing or perhaps they disappeared in the subsequent police investigation. This entire region is a bit like the fabled American west of say 1880, Carole."

"To be blunt David, I should not expect the safe return of Hilda?"

"I am optimistic, but that is my task here, to present the best possible side to an incident such as this. You seem remarkably calm about this?"

"Sanguine; this is a family where reality rules and getting to the end is always our priority. Talk to me about a ransom request; how, where?"

"I see, I think. Usually, with your parents being American, the demand for ransom will be announced locally; if they contact you directly, which I do not expect, it would be unusual."

"What are the odds local forces will follow and intercede with the banditos?"

"Very small. This is a quasi-revolutionary group with a history of just this type of activity; they have done this before; *none* of their captives have ever been recovered. Is that being too blunt?"

"Realistic, which is appreciated by the Caldecott family. I have a suggestion which might reverse their history of 'no-captives recovered'."

"Please!"

"The legal title to the recently acquired ranch - I have the written Power of Attorney to assign it to someone other than my now dead father and missing mother Hilda. Suppose you - the American Embassy - was empowered by me to offer full title to the ranch in exchange for the safe return of Hilda June Caldecott?"

There was perhaps 15 seconds of crackly silence; the only noise being the international telephone company connection of rogue electrons. "You are saying - let me be clear here - you would offer legal title to El Caldecott - the local's name for the ranch - to some individual or group in exchange for the safe return of your mother?"

"I am. If you need that in writing, have someone representing your office appear at my door as soon as possible."

"Carole, first of all, so far there has been no ransom demand, and secondly, the American government as a matter of policy does not pay ransoms."

"David, it is not *you* paying the ransom; it would be the Caldecotts. I cannot act on our behalf from California, but your facility can do that. I am suggesting an alternative to returning to me not two but one body ensconced in a coffin."

David Johnson had never dealt with a Carole Ann Caldecott previously; or anyone like her. He was first mystified why she was not sobbing and bereaving; his pre-written follow-this-text dialogue had suddenly stopped making any sense. *This* grieving family was not grieving; rather, it was looking for a solution, which on the surface seemed to run counter to US government policy in such matters. And this was making him not only uncomfortable, but unsure what to say or how to react. This was apparent to Carole and me on the receiving end with his next query.

"And you are of what age?" was the best he could do.

"Legal; I am engaged to be married in April; beyond that the question does not fit this conversation."

"So - do you have instructions for the US Embassy in Buenos Aires?"

"Get her back alive and if not unharmed at least recoverable. Barring that, we'll talk about how to return one or more bodies to Orinda. Oh yes - how long before this information - the death of John and kidnapping of Hilda - becomes common knowledge to the press?"

There was another lengthy pause, impregnated by the static of an imperfect 6,000-mile telephone connection. "I - we - have been able to keep a lid on it, but a newspaper in Cordoba has in the last hours come out with at least a version of the story, which includes some rather unpleasant photos of your - father - and they include the report of your mother missing. If you are asking how long before American-based reporters are knocking on your front door, I'd say it will be soon."

"David - here is my revised instruction. Get her back alive if you can; if not, at least a recovered body. Offer nothing about this to reporters through the Embassy except to say - and listen carefully here - if in fact there is a ransom demand, you may respond directly or indirectly after making your policy statement about the US government not paying ransoms, that the family *takes a different view*. We need to keep Hilda alive, but my agree-

"Miss Carole — come quick — Argentina on telephone!"

ment to use the Power of Attorney to free her with legal title transfer will only happen *after* she is delivered alive and healthy to some intermediary. I - the Caldecotts - will not *gift* Rancho Caldecott to a rebel band only to be rewarded with Hilda's dead body. Is that clear?"

"May I dispatch a representative of the US Foreign Service to your home to get that in writing?"

"You may and one more item to note: for future calls, whether from your office or others you authorize to contact me, a different number here in Orinda; 397 0100. Got it?"

"Yes Carole, I have it and while this sort of incident has little history in the Ambassador's office, everything about you and your handling of this has been totally unexpected. Ambassador Nufer himself has been silently listening to our conversation and on his behalf I offer you our gratitude for not turning this into a one-way street. We will stay in touch and good luck dealing with the newshounds on your end!"

"David, Mister Ambassador, we have a locked gate and sturdy wall to keep the journalists at bay! We will, as you suggest, be talking again - soon."

And my engaged partner slowly returned the telephone to the cradle, grasping my waist with both hands. "I told you it would never be dull!" It was only at this point my mind had a flash; 'this might in fact be easier to deal with if Hilda did *not* return.'

"Now - about our lunch? And would you cancel this afternoon's driving course lessons please!"

I could do that.

Chapter Forty-Two

Keeping the reporters 'at bay'

US Embassy Representative David Johnson's prediction reporters would appear at our front gate soon would not, as it turned out, extend beyond our completing lunch. A buzzer at the front gate and the intercom system announced the first from Associated Press less than half-way through an abbreviated meal. Carole instructed Gracie to respond 'the Caldecott family has no interest in seeing you', but the buzzing continued uninterrupted and shortly two men lugging movie film equipment somehow breached the wall and were walking up the lengthy driveway.

"We need to stop this - *now!*" was Carole's reaction.

She moved very quickly, motioning for me to follow, while addressing Gracie, who stood wringing her hands in the alcove archway.

"Do not answer the door and advise George to stay out of sight; not to talk with any of these people; neither you nor George are to even give anyone your names. Take the telephone off the hook and lay it down on the counter, disconnect the front gate buzzer; Bobby and I will be in The Study using another phone line."

The Red Ham Book migrated from a drawer at the end of her slender fingers, immediately opening to the 'B' listing; she was already dialling a number, while motioning for me to activate the shared speaker.

"Police Chief John Bradley please; Carole Caldecott calling."

He answered almost immediately. "Carole - I just heard from a sergeant; is it true?"

"JB - one second; Bobby, to The Library using the second phone; contact Babe and Britt and advise them to stay away from here and why; and they are to talk to nobody about even knowing the Caldecotts."

I was gone.

"JB, John Junior is dead; Hilda has apparently been kidnapped by a revolutionary gang of mountain-based banditos near Cordoba, Argentina. I am in contact with the American Embassy there. Now - I could use some ground forces here and tell me how your sergeant learned about this."

"Just ask for whatever help I can provide; my man heard it on his car radio, probably KSFO's mid-day report."

"The press or media people are attempting to get at us; a film crew breached the wall or gate and prowling around outside. Can you provide a man to put a stop to being intimidated in our own home?"

"Give me the telephone number you are using now; I assume you would have disabled the listed family number?"

"397-0100 is one of the unlisted and that's where you can reach me - give me time to answer, because it is only here in The Study and in our bedroom. Next - Bobby and I will prepare a written statement for the press people and perhaps the man you supply could provide it at the front gate. I will not speak with any media person and..."

"Carole - the man you are requesting will appear within minutes from the Orinda police department. He will be instructed to clear the grounds of intruders and maintain order at the front gate. But I suggest that a printed handout is not going to satisfy these guys. It will take me 20 minutes to be there with a siren blaring through the tunnel; release the gate for me when I arrive and we'll work out together the best way to control this."

"Wonderful John; you are my hero!"

I had returned just in time to overhear the final exchanges. "Should I call Babe back to give her an unlisted number?"

"No, we'll keep that one open for the American Embassy and JB. Use the 397-0200 unlisted number for anyone else after this, remembering it will ring only in The Library. And can you make this shared speaker more portable? Not having it available for whatever phone we are using will be a nuisance."

"I saw two spare units stored in a cabinet; I'll hook them up for the telephone in our bedroom and - where else?"

Keeping the reporters 'at bay'

"Put the second on the phone in Junior's office. Now, once that is done, contact Marie and John Henry and advise them we will need both of them here by Monday or Tuesday and confirm we have their where-available this-weekend telephone numbers."

"And next?"

She reached into a bottom file drawer, extracting a red colored folder that did not register with me. "JB will be here soon and the three of us need to create - and you write - a press statement. In this folder," handing it to me "is a two-page summary of the Caldecott family. What we shall - must - avoid is any indication you and I are even here; I don't want to see my full name, date of birth in particular, or even that I am or was a student at Acalanes appearing in anything. Our age could become an issue if it appears in the press and the last thing we need to do is become embroiled in a lengthy self-sufficiency court hearing. Damn those banditos - why couldn't they have waited until after April 20th!"

"In other words, you and I are invisible; we don't exist - at least not here. Remember Acalanes believes we are also in Argentina."

"I had forgotten that; perhaps this could help. But what really concerns me is 'Her'; I doubt she has more than the listed telephone number and when learning about Hilda and John she and her money-grubbing husband will be on the first flight out of France. And that's why we will need John Henry and Marie here before they can arrive. Again - damn the banditos' timing!"

I was away to run down our accountant and lawyer and, as it would turn out, neither had heard of the incident in Argentina, requiring my call to extend out for several minutes longer each. It was during the John Henry call an invasive blaring police car siren was noticed, loud enough John Henry asked about it. My unexplained answer would have to do; "The Marines have landed and the flag is going up." Both Marie and John Henry attempted to engage me in a condolences conversation and she asked twice 'how is Carole holding up'? I assured her *General Carole* was far too busy gaining control of the situation to be grieving - yet - but my inner-self fully understood grief might end up being spelled relief.

JB's arrival resulted in instant order around and in front of the property. Several reporters recognized him, one asking "aren't you out of your jurisdiction?" because this was Orinda, not Berkeley. All were quick to assume there was some sort of *police matter* at this address - his blaring siren possibly was a clue - and JB stopped at the gate long enough to explain.

"The Caldecotts are family friends. There is no police matter here; I'm assuming the role of family spokesman and after an hour or two, working with members of the family using the telephone, there may be a press statement. Just stay off their property and try to keep warm!"

This took the edge off the rapidly escalating feeding frenzy and JB did not object when photographers from San Francisco newspapers snapped his image. The gate open, his siren off, he moved rapidly to park and enter through the kitchen door, where Carole greeted him with a warm hug.

"I appointed myself as 'family spokesman' to that bunch; hope you don't mind!"

"Perfect John," was her instant response. "That was going to be my suggestion. You are a dear to offer help once again."

"Carole, you are family to me; I've been acquainted with you from the first day Senior invited me into his study and there you sat on his lap playing with wooden blocks at a desk. I even remember him explaining 'I'm teaching Carole Ann about numbers', but I don't expect you to remember that. Obviously his lessons stuck!"

"To that Study then; Bobby is already there and today's number block game is a bit more advanced."

Over the next 20 minutes Carole shared essentially everything with JB, including all she had been told from Argentina. Her emphasis kept returning to "It is important to me and the family that I personally never become a name in a newspaper that ties me to having any kind of authority concerning family matters. I don't expect you to recall but my next birthday in April will be number 16. Until that happens, I am vulnerable to a wide range of legal entanglements that Bobby and I must avoid. So please keep this family secret in mind as you are pressed for information by nosey journos."

Keeping the reporters 'at bay'

I thought Carole quite daring to share even that explanation with JB; famous Marine or not, Police Chief or not; his next response would instantly set my mind at ease.

"Our family is very supportive and I am referring to the ham-radio-family here. I could round up 50 hams in an hour or two to stand between you and every journalist in California and the line would not be breached. Your grandfather remains an icon in a select world and none of us will ever let his memory down."

"Thank you; it is always good to have a ham-family member in our home. One more item; Bobby and I have competent legal representation, and professional managers including a quality accountant. At some point a journalist with more skills than the rest will attempt to unravel who we are and the connection between our family and the Orinda-Oakland tunnel complex. I believe you know it was my great-uncle Thomas Caldecott who takes credit for the tunnels?"

"I do, but also recall Senior not being very talkative about that subject; another family secret buried here?"

"Nothing worth discussion; but perhaps you can divert their attention from Senior's son and daughter-in-law, and their two children, to Thomas and the contribution he made to the development of Contra Costa County?"

"Interesting suggestion. One question and then I'd like to make three quick calls. The question relates to something I believe you said in the beginning; 'Acalanes excused you' - and Bobby - from attending daily classes because you advised them you were going to Argentina to visit your parents. Did I hear that correctly?"

"You did, but if you go down that path, it immediately starts follow-ups about my safety when this incident transpired. I like the idea that I am not here - nor Bobby - but if that opens up a new trail for journalists to follow, is it worth the gamble?"

"Let me ponder that; the telephone please?" and JB began calling three newspaper senior editors to ask, as we listened to his side without the speaker activated, what they planned to do with 'the Caldecott-Argentina story'. We heard his reactions, not looking pleased after the initial call

to the Oakland Tribune. And neither the Chronicle nor Examiner in San Francisco gave him reason to smile. He ended each by explaining his family friend and family-spokesperson role, promising each it would be receiving a statement in writing *from the family* before the afternoon was over.

"The Trib already has the story and a photo of your dead father being laid out for page one," he began. "The Examiner has a set of four photos and is waiting for their reporter, who is standing outside the gate, to file his report. None of us will be pleased seeing the photos. The Chronicle apparently has correspondents in both Buenos Aires and Cordoba and they were the only one to use the word *kidnapping* when describing the missing Hilda. I am afraid we are stuck with tomorrow's paper content. None even asked about surviving family members, which is the only positive report I have, guessing this will stay on page one until somebody locates Hilda, or, she simply falls into the back of the paper if there is no closure on that issue."

"Shall we tackle the official family statement?" Carole asked.

"Who is best qualified to do it?" JB responded.

"No question - Bobby is the skilled writer in this family. Love, would you pop into Library and bring back to JB Senior's deerskin bag? Oh yes, and properly close the door to his collection, please? I believe we neglected to do that after the Argentina call."

I immediately rose to hear JB saying, "The Geronimo bag - it really exists!"

"Indeed it does and thanks to you and your squad it is safely stored here. We intend to locate a suitable American Indian artefacts center or museum and donate it to them for public display."

"That would please Senior no end; he actually agonized about possessing it."

"As do I," Carole answered, as I returned holding the ancient deerskin container, hand- stitched with dried gut line perhaps extracted from the same beast.

Carole rose to accept it from my outstretched hand, moved closer to squeeze my waist and peck me on the cheek; "just another dull day in our home," she smiled.

Keeping the reporters 'at bay'

Blushing just enough for JB to notice, my answer was "15 minutes for the first draft; too long?"

JB thought that acceptable and as I headed back to a typewriter in The Library he was saying to Carole, "Those two TV camera guys work for KPIX; while Bobby is doing his thing, suppose I go out and talk with them. I'll try the Caldecott Tunnel approach, because they are more visually tuned than the scribe journalists. OK?"

"Agreed and I will begin making some calls that have slid down the list."

Chapter Forty-Three

Suzanne's Telegram

JB would return prior to my 15 minutes of rapid creative writing completion; in his hand, a Western Union yellow envelope where a clear window clearly stated the destination - 'Carole Caldecott' and the point of origin; 'Suzanne Caldecott Thompson'.

"I don't need to be a detective to imagine what is inside here," he ventured while handing it to Carole.

"Nor I; I'll deal with it later; let's get on with the family statement," stuffing the WU envelope into a flowing skirt pocket. I did notice she had now re-buttoned her blouse, although still sans bra; JB was, after all, family.

The text I had written required a few minor changes to suit Carole, although JB thought it covered 'all the bases'. The ugly part was any change required a complete retyping, this being far before the invention of memory devices. By 4:30 he was passing out more than a dozen Xerox copies to the waiting, clearly impatient, press corps; it was 'the deadline thing' at work. The KPIX film crew had been replaced by a second-string group which asked him to read it aloud to the camera, which he obliged, standing directly in front of the shut gate; a very astute person might barely detect an outline of the kitchen windows behind the heavy vegetation up the long driveway. Allowing for drive time back to San Francisco, rapid developing of the raw stock and editing, it would not appear until the 11PM local news, immediately following Edward R. Murrow's Person-to-Person Friday night fixture on CBS. Neither Carole nor I would remain awake to see it.

Free, White & 16!

As soon as JB left with the statement, Carole called first Marie and then John Henry; it was the telegram at work. "Both will be here Monday; both to San Francisco and Scotty has agreed to be taxi again. We need to talk about this at some length, but I also need to talk to the master-trust attorney and accountant Monday morning. I am suspicious Her and hubby have drained their five-mil access level already."

"But you - we - are prepared. What's the worst case scenario?"

"That Her and idiot husband will be staying here, with us. This will be major stress for both of us, because in theory they own as much of this house as I do."

"That seems, well, minor compared to the money issues."

"Darling hubby," she began rubbing my temples with her finger tips, "you remain the optimist here. 'Her' and I do not get along, she will treat me as *junior* sister and believe me, well aware that she is a registered 25% stakeholder and my voting power is zero, zip, until after I am 20 - or married. There is no telling what she thinks she can do with John Junior deceased, and there remaining a probability Hilda may be in a similar state either before or while she is here. In her mind - his mind actually - if 50% of the voting power is dead, and I have none, they will be free to attack my percentage."

"That suggests to me we do not advise them of our April 20th marriage date?"

"Precisely, because all that would do is motivate them to find some lawyer to take their case. They would quickly work out that at 16 on April 20th I require parental agreement even in the outback of a Nevada County. I have no desire at this stage to reveal my signed Power of Attorney or Parental Approval forms that John Henry says are legal. So here are my present thoughts; are you ready?"

"I was ready for the US Marines in Carson City - go!"

"Good. If I am correct, and they have emptied their five million container, there will be a measure of desperation at work here; they need more funds to continue their spend-spend-spend lifestyle. So I introduce you as my fiancé, we say nothing and answer nothing about when we plan to be

Suzanne's Telegram

married. But I represent that *you* have funds available - which you do of course - to 'purchase their interest' in the master trust. I'll have to get John Henry to study and approve this plan but I suggest us - you in fact - offer them ten million to purchase their share of the trust. They will balk, and the negotiations will begin. But - and here is the point that I am most firm about - if they have a five million drain already in place, whatever number we - you - agree to must be less the money they have already removed. In other words, say it is fifteen after negotiation but you write them a check for ten and, in theory, the trust a check for five - both out of our joint account which of course Her and hubby do not even know exists."

"And in your mind that would be the end of Her and hubby?"

"For life; forever and *two* days!"

"And you would, assuming the worst case about Hilda, own 100% of the master trust?"

"I knew you have been listening! Almost correct, with one adjustment; half of what is mine is yours so *we* - not me - would own the assets in the master trust."

"And there will be crying and anguish and tantrums before we reach a settlement?"

"Not from me I assure you! Even little things like Gracie preparing meals will have to be to a separate schedule. I want to see Her and him only when we have John Henry or at least Marie present."

"Devil's advocate?"

"Proceed."

"Hubby decides they need a high-power attorney to deal with the negotiations; can John Henry stand up to that kind of defence?"

"My Plan-C would be to reveal the signed Power of Attorney documents; meaning I already have 50% of the voting power and no matter how they say it, they have half of that. They could consider at that point challenging the signed documents in court, but the longer they drag this out the closer we get to April 20th; at which point they remain probably broke and after we announce our marriage there is a dead heat at 25 each, while some judge rules on the authenticity of the Power of Attorney Hilda

and John signed. The only sleeper here is they would continue living in this house for as long as this takes to resolve."

"And we are paying for their food!"

"And they will instantly decide to commandeer one of the cars in the garage; the Corvette keys have already been placed in the family safe-room by me! And that brings up two other issues; that room and the contractor work already underway for the new family pool room. From their arrival you represent *you* are paying for this so they don't ponder how I could be doing so. I need to appear as living on the annual annuity from the trust and no more. And for the safe-room, we close The Library's clever swinging book-wall which disguises it inside from any but a very perceptive person. Sitting where it does, I don't expect them to discover this new addition on the outside."

"And they will stay where?"

"In Her room, one alcove from the end of the hallway on floor one; fortunately we have not begun tearing out the new opening to gain contiguous access from the present house into the new area; otherwise their bedroom would be wide open to the elements."

"That might shorten their stay!"

And we both broke down in a fit of laughter; it did not come easily in the middle of this discussion, as very little offered a humorous diversion.

Laughter subsiding, I felt the need to reassure Carole and she felt the reverse. I began.

"I feel badly you will have to trot through this entire explanation again for Marie and John Henry..."

"And I feel even worse you have been sucked into this vortex of life-in-the-Caldecott- household. I think we are dead-even my dear," and she ended up on my lap in an oversized chair moved into The Study for use by Marie months prior. It was late Friday February 26, 1954; 'infamy + 8 hours.' The Western Union telegram had been read and it verified Suzanne and husband were in transit; a point we would revisit, shortly.

Saturday would begin at 7AM; first the KWBR alarm radio and almost instantly Carole's extension on 397-0100 rang. This would be Buenos Aires.

Suzanne's Telegram

Greetings exchanged, Carole activated the extension speaker and I heard David Johnson explaining, "There is very little new to report. On your behalf, without asking first, the Ambassador authorized the expense of two search planes from Cordoba to scan the Sierra Grande Range west of the ranch. We are hoping to pick-up an indication of a group on horseback but it is too early today to report to you. The banditos hide in the mountains and as I am from California myself I can draw a parallel; think of Oakdale and Sonora. The rise from the valley floor - El Caldecott - into the Sierra Grande is very similar and someplace up there the banditos call home."

"No sign of anything asking for a ransom?"

"None, total silence, although the Cordoba police are holding someone suspected of being a local agent of the banditos - revolutionary - group. The police's inhumane interrogation tactics so far have not produced any knowledge he might hold on the subject."

"So we go from day to day. Were there no witnesses to the atrocity at the ranch?"

"There were in fact. Your father was not the only one killed; two others, workers at the ranch, also died. But one who was shot and survived has described how the banditos - and I apologize in advance for the graphic here - 'tossed your mother across a saddle horn and rode off with her'. It is not a very pleasant image."

"Does this witness say anything about whether she might have been wounded or injured?"

"He does not; two bullets were lodged in his posterior and frankly that he lived long enough to survive is some sort of miracle. And I would not put 100 percent reliance on his story; it may be just that; a story."

"Alright - I, or we, have survived the press onslaught and might I assume the story is on page one in Argentina?"

"Actually, no. It was buried, without any of the Cordoba paper photos, well to the back here in Buenos Aires, where they go out of their way not to report anything that might be considered anti-American. I fear your papers, especially in Northern California, will have taken a more sensational approach?"

"Yes and San Francisco television as well. We - my family - are basically sequestered inside our home, afraid to venture out, with journalists lurking behind every bush."

"The Ambassador and I continue to pray for a suitable ending here; we will speak again tomorrow at about this same time?"

"We shall; Vaya con Dios," and Carole set the instrument down, switching off the speaker as well. I took it as a good sign she remembered the newly installed speaker and switch.

Carole devoted the remainder of Saturday to reviewing over and again every possible clue that Her and husband might detect while in the Hacienda. She also spent more than an hour on the phone, and I listened on the speaker, with Babe and Britt, attempting to explain 'just how complicated this is - or could become' before it finally went away. Babe, to my admiration, was first to comprehend what she was explaining. And then there would be George and Gracie.

Gracie held no particular warmth for Suzanne, even less for her husband, but as she responded several times with a question mark at the end 'But they are *family*?' In her Mexican heritage world, '*family*' transcended everything else and even if they were 'evil' - a word she used more than once - 'we respect that'. Carole tried to deal with the subject, finally ruling 'in *this* family - family does not *cancel* evil'.

The day would drag; a handful of second-string reporters still hung out at the front gate, of course the intercom remained switched to off, and the listed telephone number instrument resided off the cradle.

Running down a mental list she alone carried, Carole would contact the contractor working on the new pool room, Acalanes where by some miracle she caught the principal, and a number of local shops where she anticipated Her and hubby might attempt to make charges. The contractor was quick to understand the situation; he had watched the KPIX reports at both 6 and 11. Acalanes was totally mystified how 'someone in Argentina can be calling me' and Carol fabricated she - and I - had returned for a brief visit home 'just before the incident you now know about occurred'. She would add 'we will be returning to Argentina, shortly'. The principal was so pleased we were both alive his rational thought processes otherwise dis-

Suzanne's Telegram

missed the uncanny coincidences involved. The local shops where George and Gracie shopped on our behalf had no problem with not authorizing any charges from 'anyone but I, my fiancé or George and Gracie'. Carole was basically running out of things to occupy her mind. So she called JB.

This conversation lasted more than an hour; in it Carole learned John had been the recipient of a wide range of calls and messages, most applauding his volunteering to speak for the Caldecotts, but a measurable percentage took the opposite position. "These people accused me, a war hero, of being a dupe for a wealthy family and frankly, while it changes not at all my devotion to the Caldecotts, I am mystified how a film report on KPIX could create this type of feedback."

Carole said, honestly, we did not stay up to watch the 11PM news; JB did and he saw nothing in the way the story unfolded or his edited appearance that should have evoked that kind of reaction. "I worry about American values," he finally summed up to Carole; "what has happened to this country?" Her answer would give JB pause to rethink his concerns. "A number of Americans, including hero Charles Lindbergh, actually supported Hitler and the Nazis right up to our entering the War. There will always be a percentage that simply does not get the message." Carole would also think about this conversation, privately and quietly, for almost an hour when finally hanging up; and she would return to it much later in time. She had no desire to immerse a friend such as JB in our private fracas, but could not convince herself calling the man to ask for help had been out-of-order. It was not, of course.

All of this would accumulate to complete her day and with Sunday facing us - another day of avoiding any public exposure - and one more Buenos Aires telephone call, she had a suggestion.

"You once told me about Camp Chenango and your .22 rifle practice activity. I asked George to go up today to clear the weeds from the line of fire on the rifle range and locate the printed targets stored in the garage. How about you and I see which one of us can hit the bulls-eye tomorrow?"

I readily agreed, but tonight I had my own plan about 'hitting the bulls-eye'.

Chapter Forty-Four

Message from Gracia

The 7AM phone jangling was becoming a part of our daily lives; Carole was up ten minutes prior, pacing back and forth, anticipating the bell to sound. It did.

"Carole, this is Ambassador Nufer and I have news for you."

I heard only "...news for you," as Carole switched on the speaker.

"Ambassador, good day and please proceed."

"Two pieces of news in fact. First of all, the air spotter planes - one of them - located what we believe to be a group of six horses, which seems to include a female individual on one. According to the spotter, she was sitting up and using the reins on the horse."

"Ambassador, my mother has never ridden a horse in her life, but one can always learn a new skill; especially if your life depends upon it. And the second news?"

"Yes, well - the man Cordoba police have been interrogating has finally delivered what we interpret to be a demand for ransom; five million US dollars delivered in gold or silver to a location in the Sierra Grande by parachute drop."

Carole paused and asked the Ambassador to "bear with me a minute". She turned to look at me and I shrugged my shoulders. It was not the gold or silver issue, but rather the credibility of the message. Carole apparently saw it the same way.

"And sir, who would have access to five million dollars in gold or silver and the means to drop it by parachute into a wilderness mountain region?"

"I see your point Carole; obviously only the US government or one of equal skills. What is also missing here is how we or you respond to the

demand, which has only been eked out of the man held by Cordoba police after the exertion of cruelties I am not prepared to share with you."

"Ambassador, I am grateful for both news bits but in all honesty, a man who has been tortured into making an alleged demand, which possibly was an attempt to save his own life, and a report of a woman riding a horse, is not going to brighten my day. Do you understand?"

"Well yes, I do. We obviously need something more confirmed than both of these to create a next step plan; would you agree?"

"I do. My original offer on behalf of the Caldecott family stands; we will sign over the legal ownership of El Caldecott to a specified party, but only when an intermediary accepts a living, breathing, recoverable Hilda Caldecott. I am not being irrational here, am I?"

The Ambassador paused and there was a flurry of unintelligible gibberish for perhaps ten seconds. Carole thought - I did not understand it myself - she detected the phrase *FBI* in the sounds. "Carole - we go ahead to tomorrow. How are you holding up there in Orinda? I actually remember travelling through the Caldecott Tunnel once when visiting the Bay Area; is it in any way related?"

"My great uncle Thomas was the instigator and engineer behind it and I live on the east side - as is apparent by my Orinda address. Until tomorrow?"

"Yes of course Carole; until tomorrow and we pray for more definitive news."

And the telephone connection quit.

"I missed the key question," Carol restarted setting the instrument back down.

"Which would be?" I asked.

"A description, if any, of the woman on horseback; even something about the color or length of her hair."

"Hilda would be?"

"Short, not to her shoulders, dyed blond when she left here; it may have changed color, but she never wears it long. I will try to restart tomorrow. Now, how about our shower, breakfast, and we go and dump 50

Message from Gracia

rounds of .22 caliber ammo into the targets pretending they are banditos in Argentina?”

Monday to come would be a full-on day, starting with the 7AM Argentine update, Carole contacting the trust attorney and accountant, and final prep for Marie and John Henry's afternoon arrivals. Interwoven through this, Gracie and George were putting the finishing touches on Suzanne's long-neglected bedroom. Meanwhile, Sunday afternoon included nearly an hour with Carole outlining to an attentive Gracie and George the new rules while Suzanne and husband were staying with us. Carole had been careful to put all of her discussion into a list of rules, which she refused to commit to writing, fearing such a sheet of paper might accidentally fall into the wrong hands. Rule number one was 'the wedding date, which you know, should never be told to either my sister or Curtis'. The Curtis part confused them, until Carole explained he now preferred to go by his middle, not first name Avery. Gracie was catching on faster than George, but she had the most experience with Carole and me on a day-to-day basis. "I be friendly, but volunteer nothing and not answer any questions about you or Bobby?" She had it.

"Any questions they ask about Bobby or I - simply answer 'you ask them please; I not know'."

Add to that mix Marie staying with us, John Henry there for most of the daytime hours, additional meals for guests including Scotty on Monday night and suddenly Gracie was sending George off for a massive shopping which the family had not been doing for years. The Woody would return packed to the gills at Sunday dusk.

Carole turned out to be far more skilled at the rifle range than I expected; we ended up in a total tie for points, but she did better with bulls-eyes. It was a fun experience and walking back to the house holding hands she would comment, "I want Andrew and Anita to have this skill as well."

Monday's 7AM telephone ring had Carole prepared with a written list of points to cover. This time it was David Johnson again and an unexpected associate who finally identified himself towards the end as 'representing the FBI'; no name given. Carole *had* heard FBI correctly on Sunday.

"The essence here," as Johnson tried to summarize his 'no news is good news' explanation, "is they have all disappeared and we are relying upon Cordoba police informants living in the Sierra Grande for leads. So far there have been none reported to this Embassy."

"John's body; a status report?" asked Carole, ticking off that question from her legal pad.

"Ah, well Carole, perhaps an associate with me here can answer better than I," and a new American-accented male voice spoke. "Miss Caldecott, do I understand correctly your parents advanced funds from a family trust for this property purchase?"

"That is what I understand, but it would be best for me to re-ask that question of our family's legal firm and accountant."

"You might do that before - say - tomorrow?"

"I can and will."

"Now the first of two problems. Numero Uno in the local vernacular is 'The Caldecott Family Trust' is not registered with the Argentine government to hold title to property here. And then the big problem; Dos. The individual they paid nine million US dollars did not in fact own nor have title or any access to the title for the property. In effect, they bought a 'pig-in-a-poke' and he and the money have disappeared; we believe to Switzerland. I hate like the devil to add these problems to the grief of your family, but this leads me to answering the question about your father's remains."

For the first time since this began Carole had tears trickling down both cheeks and all I could do was stand above, gently rubbing her shoulders.

"So my offer exchanging title to the land is off the table because there is no title?"

"As best we can determine, that would be correct."

"Explain 'we' to me as in 'best *we* can determine'."

"Well Carole, that goes beyond my authorization; no - I am going to tell you I work for the FBI."

The tears now advanced from trickling to flowing. "And this affects my father's body's return how, please?"

Message from Gracia

Monday was not heading off to a very good start.

"Back to Numero Uno - not being registered to own land in Argentina. This will make little sense to you, but the authorities here are refusing to release his body until they complete their investigation of this land deal matter. I can assure you the Ambassador has verified the body has been properly processed, it is being held in an appropriate facility, but getting it released for return in a casket to Orinda may take a few days."

"You said FBI - yes?"

"I did, against my authorisation to do so."

"Is there more to FBI interest in this matter than what you are saying here?"

"None as far as I have been told; it is purely a local matter and does not at this point in any way involve your Family Trust, setting aside the loss of nine million dollars."

"I have other questions, but Mister FBI and David; perhaps they can wait to another day. Is there anything else about this I should know at this time?"

There followed a hand-cupped-over microphone-piece silence with slight sounds far away; it lasted 15 seconds.

"David Johnson again Carole; no nothing at all, excepting your parents apparently did not use the services of an attorney here. The entire purchase was allegedly done on a sheet of paper, in pencil."

"You have that piece of paper?"

"The Cordoba police department reports they do; the Embassy has not yet seen it or a copy."

"When you do, can we arrange a radiofaxed copy to me here?"

"We can, but for the moment the Argentine authorities are considering it prima-facie evidence in their investigation. Ambassador Nufer is demanding a copy, if not the original, and there will be no problem sending a copy of the copy to you when we receive it; I hope I'm not speaking above my level of authority here with that promise."

"I believe any more information to me today will result in overload. Might I expect a new conversation tomorrow?"

"Good day Carole from Argentina."

She handed me the telephone handset, too brain-dead to even return it to the cradle herself; and stood to face me.

"Hug me, tightly, my soon-husband. I am crying because it is totally impossible *his* sperm and *her* egg could have created me! May God forgive me - they are both better off in another world and heaven seems an unlikely option."

Her free-flowing tears washed over my chest in a torrent; the only response I could create was, "It is barely past 7; perhaps we should skip breakfast and return to bed and cuddle for a while? We have the time..."

"Oh Bobby, Bobby - please assure me my belief that brains skip a generation is incorrect. I could not bear the possibility Hilda and John's dumb and dumber minds will end up inside Andrew or Anita; God forbid *both* children! Oh my - I believe it would be better if we have no children than to face that possibility!"

My response was instant. "Dumb and dumber may have more to do with nurturing than nature. You had the advantage of John Senior; your sister did not and all that you represent will be available to both of our children. Nurture will win out here as it did with you."

"I like that reassurance; Andrew and Anita will have your nurturing as well and between the two of us, we can actually correct anything that nature sends our way. Thank you husband!" and I was now showered with a combination of moist kisses, tears and gentle pokes in the ribs as she pushed us both down onto the oversized bed. We would stay, close but separate, until after 9.

Chapter Forty-Five

How much do we share?

By noon Carole had talked at length with both the trust attorney and accounting firm. She began with questions concerning the *status* of Suzanne and Curtis's interest in the asset and quickly learned 'They are overdrawn by 100,000 dollars', meaning the five million dollar limit had been exceeded. And this verified the dirt-poor status of Her and him. Moving on to the nine million transfer to Argentina, the accountant obliged by explaining how the funds had been sent by wire transfer in three separate three million dollar lots, all to a Swiss bank account in the name of 'XYZ Holdings'.

The attorney, however, quickly disassociated himself from the transaction even before he knew it had been a sham; 'I insisted upon seeing copies of the purchase agreement in my fiduciary status for the trust; no document ever arrived'. The accountant managing the trust accounts was less defensive. 'Your father insisted the funds be moved right then - at that moment - or the purchase option would terminate. I checked with the attorney and he verified no documentation had arrived; I accept now that I know what happened, we were lax here, but after ten years of dealing with the Caldecotts nothing about it aroused any concerns. Now I learn otherwise.'

Whether the Trust might in some way hold the accounting firm liable-for-laxness would become a question for John Henry to ponder; but not immediately upon his arrival.

Carole was initially uncertain how much, if any, to share with Marie and John Henry concerning the Argentine scam. Sooner or later they had to know, but as Carole repeatedly said to me, "The focus here is Suzanne and her share in the Trust. I suppose losing nine million out of the Trust should be explained to Her because it makes it seem less valuable, but how

and when we do that I don't know; yet. There are too many balls in the air at the same time."

We would have a quick lunch on that statement, half-way through which she announced "I have it sorted," but we would complete the meal first. Back into Senior's Study, Carole briefly outlined where she was going and how it would be presented to John Henry and Marie. "They need to do all of the negotiation and lead the conversations," she decided. "The minute we let me lead, 'Her' will revert to type and me as *junior* sister will be her *only* focus; she is not the brightest person in the room and once she goes off on that tangent, we'll be hours getting back to reality here."

It was sorted and waited only for our attorney, accountant, and companion Scotty to arrive. We would invite our doctor to sit in for a while when they appeared; Carole concerned he be a silent participant and not play catch-up after the fact. He would not be present for the initial, or perhaps any, sessions with Her and him.

2PM arrived and with it the gate opened courtesy of Scotty's personal remote control; the Army, if not the Marines, were parking. All of the greetings would be rushed; Carole had only moments prior been handed another yellow-envelope from Western Union, which a would-be delivery boy had waved from the front gate attracting George's attention. It said, in abbreviated form, 'arrive Tuesday noon from NY/stop/expect George at airport/stop/.' Her terse response to me was pushing language limits for my soon-to-be bride. "Screw them; they got this far without our help, they can navigate the last 30 miles on their own!"

All five of the important people huddled inside The Study and Carole launched into her plan.

"I will explain why, but at the end of this, I hope you Marie and you, John Henry, will agree to take the lead position in negotiating with my sister and her partner."

And off she went - 'nine million lost from the Trust in Argentina and a lax Trust accounting firm, 5.1 million in overdraft for Suzanne and Curtis, John Junior's body being held by Argentine authorities while they investigate the attempted land scam, and of course missing Hilda', about which

How much do we share?

nothing Carole relayed gave anyone much confidence she would be returning to California - 'except in a pine box'. And then she moved to her real plan. "Bobby is the buyer; he is the one offering them a negotiated purchase for their complete interest in what remains of the Trust. I will sit with him in the rear, not participating in the dialog. I expect it will be Curtis doing most of the speaking for them and you two will be our side. When you negotiate a number Curtis - and Suzanne - seem to accept, you will know of my approval when I clasp my hands together. At that point, proceed to get their signatures on a document."

And she began on the details, the facts Marie and John Henry would require to create both a dialog and ultimately an agreement to be signed. Near the end our attorney attempted to be clear on the objective.

"You - we - want them out of here, figuratively and literally. They accept the offer, Bobby writes them a check and they are gone; forever from your life. Is that it?"

"You have it and in fact I wish them gone from the moment they sign the transfer of Suzanne's interest in the Trust. And they can work out their own way to get back to the airport! There will be no hugs and kisses good-bye; I never expect to see either of them again, in my remaining lifetime."

Marie was wrestling with this. "Carole, I have one older sister and a younger brother. We don't get along entirely well, seldom share holidays, but you're dismissing Suzanne completely?"

"I am. She is Hilda in spades. She married a money-grubbing idiot to get their hands on Trust money and now she is sitting there in front of us overdrawn by 100,000 dollars. I could hand her five gold coins from the new safe-room and say 'here - pay your debt', but there is no reason for me to do that or even consider Her as my sister. If we allow them to get away with their rape of the trust, we'll be dealing with them for the balance of Bobby's and my life. It ends *now*."

Marie took this rather hard, but Scotty and John Henry were both smiling, indicating their agreement. 'Five gold coins', fortunately, did not attract any reactions save from Scotty, who had to cover his mouth to hide a laugh.

"Bobby - if I can I will go to perhaps The Library and create a complete agreement; can you type it out for correction and approval by tomorrow morning?"

I could and would. John Henry handed me some notes and disappeared, leaving Marie, Scotty, Carole and I. And Marie would restart.

"This accounting firm that shipped nine million dollars to the XYZ Swiss account; I believe they have culpability," she began.

"As do I," responded Carole.

"This is perhaps more a John Henry issue but we - I suggest - need to make an effort to recover that money; yes?"

"We do, quite separate from Suzanne," began Carole. "What are the rules in play here; how much culpability - your word - would an accounting firm have if under trust instructions, but ignoring those procedures, extracted nine million to a foreign account?"

"If this was me that did this, I would fully expect to be talking to my insurance company about a claim; and, immediately, a major hike in my insurance rates. And I would fear a legal suit and publicity that would not be pleasant. Accounting firms, especially the blue-chip variety which is handling the Trust, are very sensitive about such adverse publicity."

Carole was weighing the situation. "I'd like to have the nine million back of course. As a qualified and known accountant, would you suggest you talk first with the blue-chippers before we turn John Henry's law firm loose on them?"

Marie would consider what such a call might do to her future business world. She could not create any scenario where it came up negative.

"Actually Carole - that makes more sense as a first step than having John Henry call to advise he is filing a claim. Yes, I think that might be best. We will run it by him, but I am basically saying 'plan to do this' when the heat on the Suzanne kettle cools down; agreed?"

"Yes, I agree."

There would be small talk awaiting the return of John Henry; Marie was intrigued about the detail of Hilda's apparent kidnapping and Carole went to some effort to recreate her discussions with the US Embassy in

How much do we share?

Buenos Aires. "There is an image they portrayed of Hilda, from a perhaps unreliable witness, being thrown over a saddle horn on a horse and galloping off into the Argentine sunset. This one bothers me and you know how I feel about my mother."

"Ouch! I can barely tolerate that image, worried where the saddle horn landed."

"And that is the picture that bothers me as well. Without regard to who or what Hilda is or was, there is nothing in that imagery which says good things about her treatment in the hands of the banditos."

"In all honesty, you are where in accepting her fate?"

"She is dead; pure and simple. If not during the attack, by now. Bandits in Argentina are not known for their gentleness with females. I expect if - and I do mean *if* - we ever get her body back, it will not be something I or Bobby will view."

"And she is - *was* - your mother."

"Indeed, but you will notice I am not crying or showing emotion. I accepted her end-of-life fate at the termination of the first call from the American Embassy. And that was Friday and this is Monday."

Scotty spoke for the first time all afternoon. "Carole, what thought have you given to a suitable ceremony, or burial?"

"Very little; with confirmation that one *or* two bodies are being transported, then I will. You ask, why?"

"I know John Senior is buried at the base of the tramway; there for your parents?"

"Perhaps logical, but Bobby and I will need to talk it through. And we have to consider never recovering Hilda's body and all that entails as a legal issue with respect to her participation in the Trust."

"Oops! That had not occurred to me."

"It has to me. There will be some statutory waiting period before she can be declared dead and that will affect her 25 percent voting rights in the Trust; overlooking my signed Power of Attorney. I fear Bobby and I might have this dangling out there for many years."

"Nothing about this suggests early closure."

"No Scotty, it does not; short of her unexpected safe return, or, the unlikely competence of a rural Argentine police department."

John Henry reappeared. "Here it is; my draft of the Suzanne and Curtis Thompson agreement. I will read aloud for comment and make changes as required; then hand it to Bobby for overnight typing. Agreed?"

Before we broke up for the late afternoon, Marie was concerned; "There must be a productive time we can spend tomorrow morning before they arrive - you say when? Noon in 'Frisco?"

Carole had an answer, which in fact involved both John Henry and Marie. "Review for Bobby and me the status of the 29 companies. And thank you John Henry for the documentation granting the Orinda Clinic and property to Scotty; I plan to have a small gathering to present it to him shortly; I have been diverted recently!" She said this only because Scotty had excused himself to check-in at home, planning to return for Gracie's dinner.

Marie liked this time-use plan best. "Carole, I have the records for all companies with me and some serious concerns. After we have dealt with John Henry's draft agreement, might we spend time on those issues?"

We could of course and in the end seven of the companies would, by Marie's recommendation, 'go on the market' as returning either nothing annually or well under Senior's own ten-percent per-year benchmark. It had required several months of effort by Marie and her staff plus more than \$40,000 in fees billable to Carole to come to these conclusions and this seemed like a time window to have them reviewed.

Chapter Forty-Six

Prepping for arrival

Post-dinner John Henry would leave with Scotty, Marie would retire being a time zone in-front of us, and Carole and I would head to our third-floor escape. Neither John Henry nor Marie would have to deal with Buenos Aires at 7AM; we would.

"About burial," she began as we stripped.

Short of sixteen, it was not a topic that occupied my mind.

"Yes, what?" knowing from Scotty's conversation it had to come into discussion at some point.

"I am having trouble placing either of them adjacent to John Senior; he was my hero and well ..."

"Which leads us where?" I asked.

"I don't know, but the physical placement is an issue with me."

"Might I suggest a place next to Senior should be reserved for you, possibly me?"

"You read my mind correctly. If anyone ends up next to Senior, it is me - us. So where for John Junior whom we know we will get back, and Hilda, if in fact we do..."

"What about at the top of the tramway; still on the property, but physically removed?"

"Humm. Possible. Or what about the north end of the house, out past where the new poolroom is being created?"

"That's a rather barren and unvisited area," was my instant reaction; brown hillside largely covered with weeds and vegetation debris.

"I favor that; you can work out why in your mind. I don't like *either* end of the tramway; it is the John Senior thing."

"Are you - will you - have any difficulty explaining this to Andrew or Anita?"

"I will, until they are perhaps twelve or older. Before then it will be difficult to admit 'your grandfather was a weak-minded idiot and your grandmother a tramp'."

I lapsed into silence for perhaps a minute and Carole simply stared at me, anticipating a response, which was not forthcoming.

"You *do have* a response?" she finally urged.

In fact, I did not; here we were anticipating a tell-all-tale to our future children, which by Carole's reasoning would label both of her parents as - well, undesirable people. I simply could not create that conversation in my mind.

"Alright - north end," I finally agreed. This was, they were, after all, Carole's decision and my position in this was at best interloper. It was far easier to agree than prolong the discussion. I noticed she was rubbing her tummy and asked.

"Something wrong love; surely not Gracie's pot roast dinner?"

"No, just a bit of discomfort; it will pass."

And so, entwined, we would fall asleep.

Carole's posture stiffened ten minutes before 7, some sort of in-built reaction prior to KWBR or the telephone awakening us. She was out of bed, touching me on the scrotum as she left. Into the bathroom, then a dark green robe and sitting next to the telephone. At 7 KWBR appeared and simultaneously the telephone rang. Another day was underway and the good news was Suzanne and Curtis would be arriving.

Well, for clarity, this would *not* be the good news; make that *news* without the adjective good attached.

The usual pleasantries over, the shared speaker switch on, I remained in bed listening to both sides of the conversation.

"The report I have is not encouraging," began Ambassador Nufer. "The six horse people we reported two days ago - perhaps it was one? At any rate, they have settled into an arroyo well into the mountains and according to Cordoba police the female with them does not in any way match

your mother. We may have been tracing the wrong group of riders; I do not know and possibly never will. In the meantime I have dispatched FBI plus Marine teams, now on the ground in the same area after delivery by US military helicopter, but to be honest Carole, this is a needle-in-a-haystack search. We really don't know where to look or what we are looking for. I have the utmost confidence in the skill levels of our team on the ground there, but at some point we may admit defeat. Am I making any sense? I am receiving frequent political heat from Washington on this one."

It instantly occurred to me the Ambassador was asking Carole to say 'forget about the search - there is only so much we can do'; he was asking her to *forgive* him for not finding Hilda! Carole would stare at me as his statement vibrated in the speaker; she, too, not certain this was a *real* US Ambassador speaking to her. After the call would terminate she would ask, 'Do they appoint these people because they are qualified or is it some sort of political favor?' I would ultimately vote for the latter.

"Back to the return of my father then," Carole resumed.

"Yes - that problem. Well, he - the casket - has been returned to Buenos Aires and I expect to advise tomorrow the freight arrangements to air transport him to you. What address do we require for Orinda? It - the casket - will be delivered to you by a US military vehicle."

"Simply El Toyonal, Orinda; we are not difficult to find. But may I ask why *here* as opposed to a local mortuary?"

"Policy; you are to arrange processing beyond delivery."

"I am sorry Ambassador Nufer, but this is pushing my composure. First you cannot locate my mother, or her body. And now I am expected to open my front door one day soon and discover a casket with my father inside?"

"Yes, well I see; my inexperience in such matters is showing. My apology again. I will insure the Foreign Service contacts you before dropping the casket off in your doorway. My gracious - this is taxing my skills and I am not ashamed to admit that!"

"On this end, I have never experienced a dead father before. Are you certain we cannot - with my instruction - arrange for the casket's delivery to a local mortuary?"

"I am *not* sure of that. Could you sort it before our conversation tomorrow?"

"I can and will. Is there anything else for today? We seem to have covered all the bases at this point."

"Ah yes, well Carole, I have nothing more to contribute. Until Wednesday then?"

"Good day, sir," and she hung the instrument back up.

"No news is good news has flipped; no news is simply no-news," I offered.

"Bobby, can you call around - there is only one mortuary I know of in Orinda. I really don't want that casket sitting at our front door. If they ship it tomorrow, possibly five to seven days before it is unloaded here. What we want is for some sort of storage, postponing the burial step until Her is sorted."

"Do I ask about any sort of ceremony for the burial?"

"Again, let's wait to see how the week progresses. I am optimistic we will be permanently rid of Her and him by Friday - Saturday at the latest. And that reminds me - also call our Wells Fargo bank and determine what mechanical steps are required to obtain from our joint-signature account a bank issued Cashier's Check. If they ask the amount simply say 'to be determined, but well under our balance there'. I expect we will expedite our guests departing if we hand over a check which is instantly payable rather than having to go through a bank collection routine."

I could and would handle those requests.

The morning session with Marie started over a shared breakfast; neither Carole nor I did more than pick around the edges. Marie instantly asked about the morning call and I answered for us; "no news is simply, not-any news and we'll deal with the Ambassador again tomorrow at 7."

With John Henry's arrival, off to The Study where the first order of business would be discussion and final approval of the document prepared for Suzanne. There were changes, of course, and I headed to retyping. Carole suggested that while it was Suzanne and not Curtis we would be purchas-

ing from, his signature be affixed as well under the heading 'Witnessed by', a point quickly approved by John Henry.

"That eliminates him coming back on us at some future date; say they divorce, or she dies - whatever it might take to lure him back here asking for more money."

While I was recreating the modified document, Marie began her company analysis. "There are seven of the businesses returning significantly less than the 10 percent profits established by Senior as his base-line. I have prepared a list of those with the relevant numbers; three are in real estate holdings and after engaging an independent appraisal by a real estate professional close to each, the last number on the analysis is the expected net selling price if you elect to dispose of them. Alternately, the annual lease terms could be increased by a few percent each and that would also change their 12-month return status. What I do not know is the actual condition of each; perhaps there are renovations or other aspects that would require additional investment. So as relates to the real estate holdings, what we have is a first level study; more is required by someone. Yes Carole?"

"Marie, the suggested sale numbers quickly total around two point five while the 1953 profit return totals below point one. I believe Bobby and I will take a trip to become acquainted with the properties, but not until after April 20th."

"Perhaps a honeymoon trip!" John Henry quickly exclaimed and I could detect their shared laughter from my typing position in The Library.

And so the morning progressed; we had a final written 'Sale and Purchase Agreement' and ten Xerox copies, six of which went into John Henry's working file. It was during lunch when the 'salmon business' broke water again. Marie was more than uncomfortable with the performance which she described as, 'gradually going down year-to-year from 1948's high and when compared against references for the industry as a whole, running counter to trends'. John Henry would add, "At Marie's request I did some checking on the attorney handling this group of three companies; his reputation is not untarnished."

Carole's breakfast had been light after the unpleasant Buenos Aires conversation; now her lunch was barely being touched. I noticed immediately and decided the pending arrival of Her and him was taking a toll. There was perhaps 30 seconds of silence after John Henry described the attorney involved, and again I thought 'Carole is very distracted'. But she would respond, if delayed.

"What I am hearing is both of you fear we have some number juggling and the performance of the entire salmon business is being misrepresented?"

John Henry would nod his head for Marie to respond. "We need better data, Carole; perhaps an investigator who starts with the boat captains and works through the Monterrey processing facility down to the retail outlets. It appears to be as much as one point five is somehow being hidden or skimmed here."

If Carole's appetite was already shrinking, now it would disappear totally. "We'll come back to this."

All of us understood her apparent distraction and silently, without a conversation, each decided to keep discussions away from anything but 'the weather and social topics' until at least we were totalling six in The Study. I thought Carole had managed to remain her sturdy self throughout a non-stop series of whirlpools of stress and strife and additionally knew, if the others did not, her still lingering unpleasant memories of growing up with Suzanne.

Chapter Forty-Seven

Post the arrival

Nothing about 'Her' and him bursting through the infrequently-utilized front doorway of 'The Hacienda' would reduce Carole's tension. Suzanne launched with a tirade about 'George not meeting us', racing on to 'and now your *big* sister is here *I* will handle things and *you* can go play with your dolls!' Carole had insisted she meet them at the front-doors solo, but with Suzanne jabbering instructions to non-existent ears Her was demanding 'George, carry the luggage to my room', when they physically and literally bumped into me.

My first impressions would linger; the girls did not seem like sisters, while Curtis was short and rather overweight with a 1930s thin art deco moustache he obviously waxed and curled on each end; upward. I stood five or six inches taller than him and before Carole could speak, Suzanne looked up at me with piercing eyes to announce "You can go home now *little* friend of Carole; it is family time and there is no space for one of her playmates." Had Carole been carrying a .22 weapon, this would be the point where our problems escalated to Murder-One.

Fire in her eye and digging deeply for the willpower not to turn this into a cat fight, Carole rose to my defence. "Sister *dear*, meet Robert Britt Cooper - my fiancé and he *is* home here, right now. Unlike your Curtis, Bobby's forbearers arrived on The Mayflower. Now - listen carefully to what I am going to say for it shall not be repeated by me again."

This did stop Suzanne so abruptly - after she recovered from bumping into me and brushing past with a 'flick' one might give an annoying buzzing fly, Curtis in turn would, head down, bowl into his wife's back. In

retrospect, Carole and I would later regret we were not using the Kodak 8mm camera to record the entire episode.

Suzanne would not be disarmed so quickly. "Oh - my *baby* sister has found her tongue and she mistakenly believes she can have a live-in boyfriend! Wrong. I am the eldest one here and this is more my house than yours, *little* girl. I'll have this relic from the supposed Mayflower gone by morning. And then I want you to bring me up to date on mother and father. We will handle from this point and you return to your commoner high school."

"I think not," Carole responded, moving to push past the stumbling Curtis and foot- rooted Suzanne. Beyond the trio, I could detect the outline of John Henry and Marie standing in The Study alcove opening, instantly grateful they were first-level-witnesses to Suzanne's belligerence. If any one of us had doubted Carole's lunchtime concerns regarding Suzanne and Curtis - well - now we *all* understood from one sixty-second scene. Standing firmly in front of 'Her', Carole focused it all into a pair of sentences.

"Suzanne, *you* are not in control here; this house belongs to The Family Trust. And behind me are two trust-qualified individuals here to properly handle this complex matter," and she motioned with her arm for John Henry and Marie to join us. Standing as we were in the hallway, in somewhat subdued light, John Henry, who equalled my height and Marie, who stood a couple of inches taller than either Carole or Suzanne, possibly appeared to be advancing like a scene from a western movie depicting the life of Wyatt Earp. Behind the visitors, I stood to basically block a reverse exit.

John Henry required no movie script cards or prompting; he had - much to his shock and dismay - heard and seen the entire outrageous manner of the elder sister and was already handing Suzanne his business card along with one of Marie's.

"My name is on the card, as is Hilda Marie's on hers. We, not you, represent 'Caldecott Family Trust' and if there are any decisions to be reached during your 'short visit', it will be at our discretion." His emphasis was on *short visit* and I was in total awe until once again recalling the five years he put in as a prosecuting attorney for the San Diego County DA's office.

"Here is the abbreviated form synopsis. One, your father is dead and your mother is 99 percent likely also, as US Marines search the wilderness of western Argentina for her remains. Two, your parents misspent, as in illegally removed, nine million dollars from The Caldecott Family Trust for property which the alleged seller did not in fact own. Three, your status Suzanne as a 25-percent member of the Trust is null and void and here is why. You are overdrawn by - as of this morning - \$100,000. And that is the easy part; the harder charge is the first five million you extracted *for investment purposes* has not been invested; rather it has been thrown away on a lifestyle you were neither entitled to nor legally able to sustain. So listen closely to what follows.

"You have twenty-four hours to get straight with the Trust; cough-up five point one million dollars or you are out of this house owned by the Trust. Now - go to your prepared bedroom at the end of the hallway, freshen up and in five minutes time I want both you and your husband back in Senior's Study. Do I make myself crystal clear?"

Carole had no idea this was coming and of course I did not either. John Henry would later explain to us privately, 'I took a chance on how they have squandered the money. But all of the evidence fit and it was apparent from their faces everything about their plans to dominate the arrival had just disappeared in a puff.'

Neither Her nor him responded. John Henry and Marie stood aside and the France-based duo lumbered down the long hallway.

"Shall we await their return," suggested John Henry, beckoning with his hands to the alcove entrance. He knew exactly what he was going to say on restarting when they reappeared, which they did according to my watch in just under five minutes. "

Two empty chairs, up front and together, with John Henry on one side facing them and Marie on the other, were in place. John Henry elected to stand rather than sit and hand- motioned where - not that there was a choice - they should sit. His erect posture would be another element in the intimidation he wished to create, towering above two travel-weary, crumpled postures.

"You two have acted in a totally irresponsible financial manner," he launched, drafting off the facial responses displayed when accusing them of spending rather than investing their draws from the Trust. "You are here much less because one and probably both parents have died horrible deaths; rather you have come to get your greedy hands on the remaining assets of 'The Caldecott Family Trust'."

Curtis attempted to answer with "That is not true..."

JH would not be interrupted by a weak protest. "It *is* true - the trust financials are here, down to your expenditure extractions over the last year. You cannot defend them and I suggest you pay close attention, because what follows from me is on behalf of The Trust and it is a time-limited offer; 24 hours to be precise. There is a willing buyer for Suzanne's now diluted interest in the Trust. The offer on the table, substantiated by my word you will be handed a bank cashier's check after you both sign the relevant papers, is ten million dollars. That will be reduced by the five point one being paid back to The Trust - paying your debt. And if the math escapes you, you will then leave here with four point nine in cashier check funds. That will be the only, and the last, money either of you will ever receive from any association with 'The Caldecott Family Trust'."

It would be Suzanne who reacted first. "No more money? No more annual interest from the seventy million Senior left?"

"Need I remind again you two have reduced the alleged seventy million trusts by five point one, your parents have lost nine and in the process they are dead?"

"This will no longer be *my* home?"

John Henry now knew he had at least her attention and focus, but was disturbed by the total lack of reaction to her parent's demises, which verified in his mind their singular focus was on money. "The *Trust* owns the property, inclusive of the home. Given your overdraft non-voting interest in The Trust - you threw that away by not using your extracted funds for investments and Trust language clearly makes that a penalty for you - the bedroom you occupy *tonight* is as a 'guest of The Trust'. Is that clear?"

Suzanne's instant weeping told us all *she* understood and deliberate shuffling of the chair she sat in, a new foot away from Curtis, suggested where she was placing blame for this mess. Curtis sat dumbfounded and then in a room modulated only by sister Suzanne's weeping, he tried one more time.

"I believe we need to find an attorney..."

John Henry was quick to intercede. "Fine - you do that, but as you do think about how you will proceed to defend what you have done with the five point one to this point. And if that does not register in your mind, this: the offer is good until" - and he glanced at his watch - "3:16PM tomorrow afternoon. After that, we'll see you in court and you will *not* be staying here Wednesday night."

In a private moment shared by Carole, Marie, John Henry and I the attorney would subsequently explain 'what lit a fire in me'. "It was Suzanne's statement telling Carole 'I am in charge and go off and play with your dolls'. That did it!"

"Carole?" John Henry offered. She and I sat behind Suzanne and Curtis but off to Marie's side. My future-bride did not rise and on this cue simply stated *the house rules*.

"For tonight only, Gracie has prepared one of her elaborate Mexican dinners. John Henry, Marie, Bobby and I will be served at 6; Gracie will serve you two, separately, at 7:30. Breakfast tomorrow will be the same way; you may eat at 8:30. You would not be aware of this, but the reason our listed telephone is inoperable relates to Hilda and John Junior's incident. We - Bobby and I - spent Friday, Saturday and Sunday isolated here as dozens of news reporters and TV film crews prowled the grounds. I have avoided all public exposure to this point and you are well advised to do the same. If you require access to a telephone, use the unlisted number two line in our dead father's office; it is connected and the number is on the phone. That is the only one you shall use. Finally, I am in daily contact with the American Embassy in Argentina and tomorrow after your breakfast, with Marie and John Henry present, I will give you a status report. You have no

concept of what our parent's last hours involved and frankly sister, I have no plan to ever share it with you." And she stopped.

Curtis knew when they were dismissed and poked the still weeping Suzanne on the arm. Her look in response was not filled with love and tenderness. They both stood, disappeared out the alcove opening, foot-dragging down the hallway to their temporary bedroom.

Marie suggested, "I believe that went quite well; Carole - might John Henry and I be taught how to operate the tram on our own? I believe there is time before dinner."

Chapter Forty-Eight

Hilda has been found; 'we think'

Carole and I retired early and for the first time in 24 hours, at dinner, she ate normally; clearly the impending stress had been reduced. Several times we could hear sounds, if not actual words, suggesting Curtis was using the telephone in Junior's office. It would be Wednesday before we had any clue where or to whom he was communicating.

Carole's fertility-calendar advised 'Friday and Saturday coming would not be suitable days', so this being one of the last days *before*, we took advantage of the calendar's advisory. By 9 both of us, wrapped as one, would be sound asleep, even as faint whispers of telephone conversation continued drifting into our room.

7AM was unavoidable and Carole, true to recent form, was pacing the floor, today in a royal blue robe, by 6:50. KWBR came on, and again the tingle of the telephone sounded. She quickly remembered the shared-speaker switch and I heard "Carole, David Johnson here today; Ambassador Nufer is meeting with some - well - federal people." He of course was alluding to the FBI.

"I will ask you to get to the crux here; is there any news about my mother? And oh yes, I have deskfaxed to your office the details for the casket delivery to a mortuary; if that does not register with you, ask the Ambassador."

"It - the fax - is here and the crux is we will probably be shipping two, not one."

"You have located - dead - Hilda?"

"We believe so. The Marines back-tracked the trail apparently followed away from El Caldecott - setting aside it was not El Caldecott in the end

- and around ten miles uphill they discovered an unburied female body. I really wish you would not ask me to share any further details except I will say everything about the description and photo we have from the Marine squad totally matches your mother's passport photo we have here. Carole?"

"David - this may be difficult for you to accept but I am - in fact - relieved. I accepted she was deceased back on Friday when we first talked. From there it has been, for me, about recovering her body. So as strange as this may sound - good on the Marines!"

"You are a brave lady. Assuming everything I am telling you is verified, we could have Hilda - her body - back in Buenos Aires by late today. I suggest - you decide - we then arrange transport of both parents in one flight and I am told that if we do that on say Saturday, the flight will go first to Caracas, then transfer to Houston and finally San Francisco. That suggests to me and I am not really skilled here - Tuesday or Wednesday next week to Orinda. Are you still with me?"

"I am and although you cannot tell, I have a weak smile. It was the unknown element here - and pondering whether her remains would ever be found - that has created the largest anxiety in my heart."

Sitting on the edge of the bed I knew in *my* heart what it was *really* all about; a Hilda body would erase the uncertainty of an eventual court-decided death ruling.

"I am not certain we require a call again tomorrow Carole; I suggest Friday, as by then we will be further along with the arrangements and of course wish to share them with you. But there is one more element which may come up."

"Yes?"

"The individual who represented he owned the property your parents believed they were purchasing; the Swiss federal police have located him and there may - I am guessing here - be a visit to you or your Trust attorneys to verify the details of the fund transfer. This should in no way intimidate you but Uncle Sam - Treasury - is concerned how that amount of money got out of the country on what was apparently a total scam."

"Should I spend any time worrying about this?"

"No, none. But the chance of retrieving the trust funds from a numbered Swiss account appears very unlikely and I thought as the senior surviving member of the Caldecott family you should know this."

"Thank you David Johnson; Friday morning then?"

"Yes, Carole and thank you again for being so brave."

Carole switched off the speaker and replaced the telephone all in one swift move. She was smiling when turning to face me.

"I think I need a long, lingering shower with my favorite human in the whole world; come on!"

All of Buenos Aires would be shared with John Henry and Marie over breakfast, he having been deposited at 7:30 by Scotty. Both extended their sincere condolences to Carole, who expressed appropriate emotion by allowing tears to form over her pupils. John Henry was first to verbalize the obvious legal point.

"That eliminates the uncertainty of Hilda being a factor in the regrouping of the Trust."

And of course it would also impact whatever reaction we heard from Curtis and Suzanne. Carole's signed Power of Attorney documents, not yet revealed, now ruled without question and as long as Suzanne and Curtis believed their vote was null and void, well, there would be no voting contest.

Carole would add an additional thought for John Henry's consideration. "While the Trust attorney apparently did not participate or approve the nine million loss, I am uncomfortable with them continuing as the Trust supervisor. Would you consider taking this on?"

He smiled and turned to Marie for some indication of her reaction. The pause, a Carole classic invitation, was just long enough.

"And Marie - it should go without saying after we clear up the nine million issue you will handle the Trust finances in the future?"

This would set the stage for an extremely aggressive *teaming* of John Henry and Marie as we reconvened with Her and him.

Curtis was fidgety even before he sat down and Suzanne did not walk with him, but followed a good - and I timed it - thirty seconds behind.

He would begin. "I have advice - legal advice."

"Go on," urged John Henry.

"I start with neither you nor Marie are in fact the registered representatives of the Trust."

"That is true, but we do represent the majority of the Trust votes."

"How is that possible - with John dead and Hilda assumed dead?"

"These two pieces of paper, which I will pass you to read, but will not allow taking with you or copying at this stage. They appoint Carole with Power of Attorney for all of Hilda and John's Trust interests," and he handed the papers - copies actually, since the originals were presently locked away in the safe-family-room. "And I remind - you and Suzanne have no voting rights at all, as long as you have an overdraft with the trust."

Curtis, with Suzanne now sitting next to him, but pointedly separating her chair from his before assuming it, read the documents. "These need to be court tested," he responded.

"Perhaps, but remember that as of 3:16PM today, the offer to cash you out of the Trust expires and you have as of now spent your last night here."

It would be Suzanne who responded. "I told you Curtis, your father is wrong; there is no hope here. *He* is the one you gave two million dollars and ..."

Curtis slapped her distant leg rather aggressively; hard enough Marie was visibly distracted.

"Dad is not an element in this," he began. "That money was for our benefit and..."

John Henry would interrupt the exchange. "Curtis, Carole has something to tell you."

My bride-to-be in slightly over a month was quick off the mark. "Suzanne, Hilda's body has been recovered; she did not die a natural death and both will be returned to me - not you - next week from Argentina. And the scam artist who allowed our parents to donate nine million dollars to his numbered Swiss bank account is being questioned by authorities there. We will *not* recover that money from Switzerland, however. The Trust is approaching a cash-flow crisis; you would do well to listen to what is being

said, because this is your *only* opportunity to get out of here with spending money."

And Marie would immediately tack on, "Your parents were foolish and careless and that seems to be a family trait - with the exception of Carole. The Trust is cash insolvent because of you two and your parents. The offer on the table for ten million originates outside that Trust and you would do well to consider how long you two can exist with no funds."

Curtis would make one, final, desperate try at salvaging the situation; clearly he was presenting '*his* family argument' and not speaking for Suzanne, who at the end was the only part of his marriage who counted for The Caldecott Family Trust.

"And where is this miracle ten million dollar benefactor?"

It was my turn to speak, which John Henry indicated by nodding at me.

"I am that benefactor; I am prepared before 3:16 today, to hand you a bank cashier's check for four point nine million after you sign the agreement which forever separates you and Suzanne from the family Trust."

"A holdover from the Mayflower assets?" Curtis responded with obvious cynicism.

"I am not without resources," I answered.

Suzanne was next. "Curtis, we can drag this out and live in The Orinda Motel using your father's charge card for weeks or months; or we can go back to New England and then home to France with nearly five million. I am urging us to do just that."

He sighed deeply and nodded.

"That is agreement?" urged Marie.

"It is," Curtis muttered softly.

Carole had been holding my hand tightly for the last few minutes. She dropped it and clasped both of hers together, verifying with eye contact John Henry saw her do this. It was almost over.

The legal document John Henry wrote and I typed now became the 'paper of disagreement' until after 10:30. Several small revisions were agreed upon and I returned to The Library to retype it. By 12 noon, signatures in

place with me as the purchaser, but followed by the phrase 'or assigns', I was sitting in the Wells Fargo Lafayette branch, courtesy of driver George with the manager. A cashier check for 4.9 million would be back at The Hacienda by 12:45 and Carole had rather graciously offered Suzanne and Curtis two favors; George would return them to the San Francisco airport, against George's best judgement, and Gracie would feed them sandwiches for lunch. By 1PM their travel bags were in the back of the Woody and 1:10 exiting the front gate. There had been no 'good-bye' hugs and kisses.

A feeling of 'job well done' permeated the follow-up discussions as Carole, with obvious advance planning, outlined how she believed the family Trust should be restructured. She suggested, urging in fact, that four people be on the Trust board inclusive of John Henry, Marie, me and herself. The understanding was anytime Carole and I disagreed with a tie-vote against Marie and John Henry, our view would prevail. It was, after-all, *her* assets that were being manipulated here. There was also a broad understanding, likely two decades away, that Andrew and then Anita would eventually replace John Henry and Marie. It all made 'perfect, logical, *Carole* sense'.

George returned by 3:30, grateful to have survived and promptly told Gracie all he had overheard during the trip to the airport. The most important of which may have been Curtis saying to Suzanne, 'Fortunately they never uncovered our gambling debt at the Monte Carlo Casino'. Four point nine million today, something less when they arrived home in France. They were gone but John Henry had forecast, 'one or more of them will return pleading for more money'. But not before Andrew appeared from between his mother's painfully spread, stirrup-supported legs.

Scotty, telephone advised, cancelled his 4 and 4:30 appointments and arrived shortly after 4. He insisted he be allowed to take us all to dinner in a Lafayette Italian restaurant of some reputation; Carole initially said no and then remembering the title-papers and her planned ceremony to present them to Scotty, quickly agreed. It would be a joyous occasion, which all would fondly recall for a decade or more.

Nobody mentioned Hilda or John Junior; Curtis and Suzanne were the frequent butt of humor over dinner and Carole, who had been prepared

Hilda has been found; 'we think'

to 'go as high as fifteen million', was exceptionally grateful to both John Henry and Marie for the way they conducted the negotiations. I was simply overwhelmed to be a part of something which would live in my mind until the day I ceased to breathe. In fact, that day would be well after Scotty also ceased to breathe; he being my 40-year senior. On the brighter side, he would deliver both Andrew and Anita as the circle of life would continue.

Chapter Forty-Nine

Normal is as normal does

Hilda Marie and John Henry departed mid-morning on Thursday with the agreement a less stressful session would reconvene around the end of the month; George, now less nervous about the airport trip, readily agreeing to assist. Carole would spend the balance of the morning playing catch-up telephone calls; Babe at the county library, Britt at the ranch, JB to advise the bodies - plural - were likely around the 12th. He asked about a service and Carole explained it would probably consist of the two of us, Gracie and George and a to-be-selected nondenominational cleric of some sort. The pool-room contractor was taken to a hillside location she had settled in her mind and would arrange for two suitable graves, also volunteering to assist with the mechanics of lowering the caskets and covering them with earth. Normally with Carole it was all about 'detail', but on this one she was coasting, anxious only to 'get them in the ground' with as little fanfare as possible. Scotty was pressuring her to attend the ceremony and she was resisting, concerned that if he was allowed, pretty soon it would expand into a crowd and someone would snap pictures and before you could say morbid-curiosity we'd be back on page one and KPIX's 6PM news. Orinda Mortuary had made a pitch for an elaborate affair including a portable circus-size tent; when the director used that word - circus - to describe the tent he hoped to provide, that settled the matter. "This will in no way turn into a circus!!" she had advised him in a tone of voice only a fool would ignore.

My instructions were the easiest; "Get us back into the driving lessons - as soon as Monday, from which I calculate on the 18th we can take our exams." And my incentive - not that I required one: "You will be the *first* to drive the Corvette!"

With George back from the airport and a late lunch just over, we would be moving from the treadmill of recent life onto a more structured set of plans covering the balance of March. "Only 47 more sleeps until I will place the ring on your hand and you will add my missing one!" She had assured Babe "this is on schedule; no change, no delays", although in fact with 'Her' and him now permanently removed from the family equation the urgency for marriage was no longer an issue. It was only after Carole reassured Babe April 20th held this fact would click with my bride and I had to admit when she excitedly explained the facts to me, I also had not tumbled to the new era. A very long and very generous hug with frequent moisture exchanges followed as we stood in The Library together. Interruptions had shut down the coin and asset item-by-item inventory and with the luxury of time on my hands I was again focused. She would join me after completing 'just a few more' calls.

Several items, or bags of items, would require outside expert evaluation. The blue-white diamonds were one of those, as were a number of silver bars similar to those Carole had swapped to Kyle Moore for the contents of his ore-cart 444 collection. The 444 group was proving the most difficult to separate; unlike the tidy bag-by-bag sets John Senior had created, based upon mint site location, date and in some cases coinage face value, what 444 presented was a hodgepodge. Kyle had used a wilderness knapsack, stuffed to the tie-down flaps with loose coins, thumb-size bags each with its own mystery, and much to my initial shock a Colt single action .45 caliber pistol, which appeared to be period-authentic to the early 1870s. The surprise when removing it from a knapsack side-pocket turned to instant stress when I realized there were five *live* shells lodged in the chambers. I could detect Carole was on the telephone, so gingerly I laid it down on an empty bench-top, carefully directing the barrel towards the wall. The grip was much stained and I missed noticing what much later would be revealed; scratched initials.

"I can see the metal ore-cart bottom starting to appear!" she exuded, when finally completing *a few more calls*. It had been over an hour and my finger pointed, several times, to the rather grimy Colt revolver lying on

a workbench nearby. She started to reach for it and I instantly cautioned "Careful love - there are five live shells in the chambers."

"Oh my! What would make this one special enough for Kyle to have included in the 444 set; that is where it comes from?"

I explained the knapsack side-pocket and she now very gingerly touched the weapon, bending to inspect it closely. "Senior has a sizeable collection of others, which to me appear identical; I remember him telling me the history - something about the US Army and 'Custer's Last Stand', but I'm afraid beyond that we'll need Babe's research. Someday I'll get all of the collected older weapons out to show you; most have tags attached indicating their origin, vintage, and where they were used. The entire collection sits within feet of you, there under that bench behind the double locked door," pointing just to my right. "There are more than 100 unique weapons behind those doors; when you have a minute, perhaps call Kyle to ask him what makes this particular revolver part of the content of 444 he saved for Senior."

With the exception of the burial event, which finally occurred on Monday the 15th, and the successful completion of the driving license exams ten days later, the last three weeks of March would be the most stress-free of our time together to this point. Carole would be good to her promise of my driving the Corvette 'first' and I got as far as the front gate when she announced "it is my turn". The car's feel was poor, the acceleration slow, and about the only good feature was its head-turning notice on the streets of Orinda.

Marie and John Henry would return Sunday the 28th and during a marathon 48 hours we would complete months of preparatory work by both of their teams. Effective April 21st, a date John Henry selected, he and Marie would, with Carole and I, become the new members of 'The Family Caldecott Trust' board and simultaneously his firm would take over the legal representation. Marie's accounting business would assume her role on May 1st. The blue-chip accounting firm, after haggling and two high-level conversations with John Henry, was promising to refund the nine million dollars 'by April 30th'. And there had been not one word or message of

any kind from Her or him; not that we were anticipating communication; even *they* were unlikely to race through four point nine million in the weeks since they departed.

Nonetheless, Carole was distracted and denying this to be true. But as I traced it forward in my mind after stumbling past the Her and him visit, and the arrival of twin pine caskets, it would appear to be most pronounced from around the day we completed our 40 hours of tutored driving courses; the 23rd. And there had been a clue which I ignored mostly out of my youthful lack of experience in such matters. "I am simply adjusting to a major shift in life, my dear," she would assure me when finally allowing the topic to be discussed. "Surely *you* can appreciate how difficult this has been for a couple of months?"

I could, of course, and immediately felt like a cad for even pressing the issue however lightly done. And Carole would transpose our conversation to a day-current count-down until April 20th. Her research, assisted by some backup from John Henry's office, had come to a conclusion which I thought totally appropriate; Carson City and Ormsby County for both the license procedure and a simple ceremony before a local judge. Carole put me on the telephone to Clem, booking a D18 for the morning of that date; Babe and Britt would join us. And John Henry arranged a 12 noon schedule with the county's best known and famously maverick judge. It would be 2:30PM April 20th, following lunch at an ill-chosen Chinese restaurant recommended by the judge, that Clem would lift the D18 back into the air above Carson City; Britt in the co-pilot seat. Babe flowed tears for an hour and my father exposed two rolls of 8mm movie film; I was dressed in muted brown tones with each piece I wore selected by Carole, including a wear-once-only silken pair of underpants; she was in white naturally and very, very lovely. It would be over the oriental lunch that she suddenly bolted for the restroom with hardly an 'excuse me!'

Babe worked it out far in front of Britt or me. With Carole still missing, she reached for my hand and whispered "How far along is Carole?"

My response was a dumb and dumber stare; not even a remote chance I understood the question.

"How far along what?" I responded.

"Your wife is pregnant; when is the due date?" I would later realize *your wife* were two words only 90 minutes *correct*.

I could not even imagine the statement to be true, but within a few minutes it would become obvious, even to me.

Carole returned; her face ashen to contrast with her flowing dress and headband, with instant apologies. "I am so sorry; I never dine Chinese and in the exhilaration of the wedding I simply ignored common sense. I will be alright now," reaching to squeeze both my hand and her new mother-in-law's. Of course, the unanswered statement from Babe hung *pregnant* in the air and Britt decided this was his cue to say "excuse me - men's room".

Babe was intending to insist on an answer, but she did not wish to turn the wedding lunch into an unpleasant event. So she simply placed her free hand atop Carole's and smiled. I instantly deduced with Carole's responsive eye contact to Babe that my mother was correct.

I sat there essentially stone-faced, attempting to reconstruct *how* and *when* this might have happened. Nobody was more careful than Carole; well - as I reconstructed it, perhaps less one time. As she and Babe exchanged small talk and Britt returned with a concerned look on his face, my mind worked backwards. There had been the mid-March times when Carole seemed distracted, the later March conjugal relations which I *now* suddenly realized had occurred during a three-day stretch on the calendar which Carole had previously marked as 'period', an event which never occurred. Backwards from there I got as far as late February and her rubbing the stomach, discounting it as 'a Gracie dinner reaction'. And then my mind landed on February 5; the night we sat naked on our bed, I formally proposed, and for hours we were involved in extended relations. I could, *now*, actually picture the orange marked 'February 4-5-6' on the wall calendar as 'NO!' dates. Right square in the middle of her fertility days we had spent hours transferring my sperm *tadpoles*. And now with some quick arithmetic I had the answer to Babe's question; Carole would be expecting our first child around the 15th of November.

Walking back to the D18, Carole holding Britt's hand, I bent down to whisper into my mother's ear. "If your assumption is correct, mid-November,

but please let her tell *me* first - before you bring it up again!" Babe's reaction was to stop us dead, hug me more tightly than I could ever recall, and whispering back; "I know this was not planned; there is a 50-50 chance the first one will be Andrew!" She was already mind-busy designing a nursery for the first-born.

It was a disturbed Britt and smiling Babe that left us at the Walnut Creek Aerodrome. I had been entrusted with both our copy of the marriage license and the judge's marriage certificate; woe-be-to-me if anything happened to either! George would carry a cuddling wife and new husband back to Orinda in record time as we were going against the late afternoon commuter traffic.

By Carole's instruction Gracie had prepared a candlelight-dinner in advance, but her still ashen face was rather obvious, even to Gracie. As the pork roast and fixings were being served, Carole grasped Gracie's hand warmly and spoke. "Gracie my dear, I have had an eventful day and as much love as you have put into this meal, might I have a weak Ceylon tea and a cup of consommé please?" And *now* Gracie knew and she too could begin daydreaming about both a nursery and her new opportunity to help raise an infant.

Dinner remained quiet, with romantic flickering candles and soft music on a new sound system she had received as a stockholder-gift from Admiral; Carole grasped my hand every minute or two and smiled at me with large, loving eyes and this stretched a 30- minute meal into nearly an hour. I had not yet lost my appetite, but I would shortly.

Chapter Fifty

This girl is a woman now

Hand in hand approaching the first set of stairs, a suggestion - if anything she uttered could be taken as a suggestion. "Let's ride the tram; we haven't used it for months. You sit down first and I'll rest on your lap." I remained in my wedding suit, Carole all-white, although her face had now returned to normal color.

"This might be quite handy sometime; I think we will leave it in," she began, essentially begging me to ask why? I missed the clue.

Onto the second tram and resuming the same positioning, she would try again. "I have something to discuss with you when we reach our room." I smiled in return and pecked her on the close-by neck line protruding above the white-ribbon secured collar.

I was being set-up and knew it; it mattered not. Carole was always at the end in charge and that presented me with no quarrels. She urged me to 'strip to your shorts' which was a tad unusual, since full-naked was the usual format in the bedroom. Very carefully she removed first her wide white hair ribbon and laid it with great care on a table. Next it was the wedding dress, after asking me to "unhook the back please, love". It was a bit like watching what I imagined a strip-tease might be, but with no experience in such things it would simply be a reflection coming later in life. The dress came off with extraordinary care; no part of it would be tangled or snagged as it was removed. A brand new cushioned hanger appeared from an alcove closet and once hung and hand-pressed from a hook, a heavy cloth zipper cover carefully placed over. I looked at her with a quizzical face, sitting fascinated in my silken wedding shorts.

"This will be saved and carefully stored for Anita or Andrew's bride. I hope it will fit them properly but, if not, we'll have it altered."

Here I sat expecting Carole to reveal her condition and she was totally focused with preserving her wedding dress for the next twenty-plus years in safe storage that tomorrow would be placed inside a by-design long-term garment container delivered for the family safe-room. It was *the detail* at work once again.

Her bra came off, her panties did not and she bent to kiss me on the forehead as she frequently did, hopping across me on the bed to her side. "Now, a discussion!"

I repositioned myself, propped against the voluminous pillows that had made my ankle recovery more pleasant, and taking her right hand, I smiled. "Please - continue."

She did not pause, even take an extra breath. "We have an appointment tomorrow with Scotty; 10AM."

And she stopped; dead-stop looking at me for a response. There could only be one.

"This is a medical visit or something else? You didn't eat very much today; are you not feeling well?"

"I'm feeling fine, you are feeling fine. Yes, I had an incident today with food and we are going to see Scotty because ..." and she stopped speaking long enough to reach beneath her stack of pillows to extract a glossy 9 by 12 book, passing it to me.

'Preparing for your first child' was the title. I was expected to act shocked, surprised, overwhelmed and none of those occurred. I read the front cover, quickly, studied the photo displaying a mother cuddling a newly born child, and opened the book.

"And the date will be?" was my response.

"You suspected??" she began.

"I did at lunch; Babe instantly had it worked out and I believe Gracie did when we arrived home. It is almost as if *you* are the last to know!"

She arrived in a tumble across the foot or so separating us on the super-size bed. "I knew it; I knew you would pick up my vibrations. Tell me darling, when did you first suspect?"

And so I restated my earlier mind-test, beginning with her rubbing her tummy late in February and ending with today's lunch episode. "February 5th, our engagement night; yes?" I finished.

Both of Carole's hands caressed first my face, then my shoulders and dropped to my stomach. "Let me remove your wedding shorts," she murmured, while doing it anyhow, immediately followed by hers being tossed across the room in the direction of the waiting chair; both missing the target.

"This was not my plan," she began. "It is six years too early but you know what?" My answer would be a microsecond too long in appearing. "All of our family and financial problems are sorted so what if it is early? There is only one aspect to this I regret."

I knew my cue point and was quicker this time. "And that is?"

"I have books and extensive information from Scotty advising how we plan an exact time and point in my month to increase the odds the first one will be *Andrew*. What we did was a chance shot; I missed the *opportunity* to at least plan male-first. But I have to tell you, Scotty has always insisted there was little evidence such planning actually works although I did *so* want to try. And now it will be 50-50!"

"Not to be negative, but the page I turned to in this book," fingering the 9 x 12 lying by my side, "says it is 49.5-50.5; by a slight margin there are more females in the world than males."

"Think positive thoughts and tomorrow we jointly see Scotty. I know what to expect; he will say mid-November based upon the evidence, he will advise it will be June before even the most unreliable tests can be done to determine in advance our child's sex. I am prepared to do anything, spend any amount so we know as soon as possible. We have a nursery to plan, more than two dozen businesses to oversee while we are preoccupied with the planned birth; it is very exciting to me and I am well past being upset by it happening six years too early. A plan is just something to be modified by circumstances and, my husband, today we are becoming parents - happy wedding night and - oh yes! - Happy 16th Birthday!!"

And we engaged, it briefly occurring to me for some months into the future there would not be 'NO!' dates on the calendar applying to our conjugal relations.

The Scotty appointment would be almost post-reality. On his last two visits to the Hacienda, he had detected signs, which he kept to himself; 30-plus years of experience shining through. And he told us, after determining Carole - and I - were prepared to go ahead with this, there being another option at the under three-month point, everything Carole had already shared with me. "June at the earliest and the tests will be at best 60-40 to determine sex; by August we will be 80-20" and "Carole, I know you are rigid with your diet, but before you leave I will give you additional printed instructions; follow these please. You are healthy and strong and young and there are no problems I can anticipate."

Carole asked about "continued conjugal relations," causing Scotty to smile and laugh. "No problem until perhaps mid-October," he answered; "as you approach your due date, it will be more a matter of comfort for you than any risks."

He turned to me. "You have lived with the smile of my life for - let me count - seven months now. There are many 16-year-old mothers, but far fewer 16-year-old *married* fathers. Can you cope with not only Carole, but an *expectant* Carole?" It was a serious question with strong subliminal meanings.

Although I did in fact have my own living father, which Carole did not and Scotty was her surrogate replacement, 'doc' would be a close second to my Britt. I'd be more honest and sincere with him than my actual father, primarily because of his relationship with Carole. "Yes sir," I answered, being far more formal than the occasion required. "This is not our - Carole's - master plan, but as she has expressed to me, essentially all of the trauma created by family and legal matters is now past so if we are six years early, so what? She is ready and as long as Carole is, I am as well."

I don't think Scotty expected a different answer, but now he had me on-record should there ever arise a reason to remind me. There would not be.

Grabbing my hand in a gentleman's handshake and pumping aggressively, he turned to Carole for a bit of post-event gratitude. "For the first

month in all of the years I have occupied this building, there is no rent. Therefore Carole - and Bobby - there will not be any charges for today, or subsequent visits, or the delivery of what we all hope and pray will be named Andrew. And that will continue for as long as I am here and your family is in my office or your home under my care."

Carole immediately burst into tears and I was not far behind.

Back in the Corvette, Carole driving of course, we would be half-way back to home - a five-minute drive. She pulled to a stop aside the road and looked at me with a serious face. "Bobby, while we are on this subject," and of I course had no idea what that *subject* might be, "let us finish."

"My dear, if this is going to take more than a few seconds, might I suggest you shift to park in this thing?"

Carole laughed and obliged, taking her foot from the brake. "I'm very serious about there being only a two-year separation between number one and number two. Without respect to whether the first is Andrew, or Anita, when we are 18, there will be the second. This may accelerate our life-plan but I am hoping you agree; it is important to me to know this, *now*."

"Now? Sitting here on the side of a street in Orinda?"

"Now!" she responded.

"Wife Carole - a few days back I called the Chevrolet dealer and ordered a 1954 Corvette and simultaneously pre-ordered a 1955. I expect each year this will continue, hoping that eventually they get the design correct. So in 1956, we will christen our second-born with that year's 'vette. I agree concerning age 18, but I also hope, my dear, we decide now and forever that two is our number for children, even if we end up with a much-enlarged garage filled with successive generations of this car!"

If it had been possible, setting aside our street-side public view, to create conjugal relations in a 1953 Corvette, it could have happened. First she spewed tears for more than a minute, wiped her face and carefully checking the trio of rear-view mirrors shifted back to drive-one and pulled slowly onto the pavement; it was, at the end of the reflection, a six-cylinder sluggish car. My wife was a happy person and by the 60s we would finally have a 'Vette of reasonable concept and two healthy, growing children. But the

Corvette family, unlike the children agreement, was not destined to stop expanding at two, likely to grow at the rate of at least one-per-year for decades to come.

There was one more growth issue lingering in my mind; the late January telephone discussion with Wells Fargo's Reno manager, and fellow ham, Ben Campbell. Our joint local-Lafayette account, still lingering above seventy million, was interest-earning a disappointing half percent per year whereas when the money left Reno, four percent. Campbell had suggested he come to W6HD for a visit and out of that would develop a joint decision; we would return 68 million back to Reno, as John Henry had by now obtained a court ruling which transferred the account name to Carole - which she in turn quickly modified to be 'Carole Ann Caldecott-Cooper, *or*, Robert Britt Cooper'. Campbell had continued paying the original 4% on the balances still arriving at a rate greater than a million per month, courtesy of the ongoing management of the businesses Carole inherited from Senior. And anytime we might require more than the remaining Lafayette balance, almost treated as household play-money, one of us would simply now write a Reno bank check; on the bottom line, nearly three million in annual interest versus Lafayette's less than 400 thousand. Carole was especially pleased with my working this out before she had done so, but then she had something else in her focus; a growing tummy.

Chapter Fifty-One

This is now a 'family'

By August we were 80 percent certain *it* would be named Andrew. And by September, past 90 percent. But Carole already decided, after the 60 percent June analysis, "everything will be blue" and as the contractors were finishing the pool-house she brought them inside to make three corrections to the house proper. 'Her' room would be stripped to bare walls and recreated to allow 'when Andrew is two or three, this will become his room'. If I thought that was the finale, I would be wrong. "And while they are at it, Junior's office will be emptied and recreated for Anita." Nor was my blossoming wife finished, yet. "The spare bedroom adjacent to our bedroom, which was originally set up for you; we need a direct entry into it from us and it will become the nursery. When Andrew is moving out, Anita will move in; I want them close by for their first two years; you do appreciate I will be breastfeeding?"

I had in fact read about this in 'Preparing for your first child' and while not totally understanding more than the mechanical process, could not even postulate Carole's insistence on this issue.

"Of course you will *share* what is left over" was a statement I heard that did not register and would essentially wait until December to be clarified for me. Not many sixteen-year-old males had this *luxury* to cope with.

Sometime in mid-summer she also decided a spare bedroom would be adapted for home-schooling both children. Her mindset regarding both public and private schools, and in fact tracing backwards to her conversation with JB following his KPIX appearance and the upsetting public reaction, had finally festered. "I do not want Andrew or Anita exposed to riff-raff" was her first statement. I was not certain what 'riff-raff' might be, but listened, as had now become my assignment. "Our children will before

Anita's birth live within a half-billion dollar cocoon; I want them educated *properly* and between you, I and some outside help, they will be taught *values* that never appear in either public or private schools. You do agree I hope?" Never dull and only a dunce would disagree. In the days following, after my *agreement*, I deduced 'blondes that twirl their pony tails' and 'the original Eddie Fisher fan at Acalanes' possibly represented the term riff-raff.

Our own schooling was another issue. While we formally erased our names from the Acalanes rolls on April 21st, Carole's promise to Babe "He will speak first year equivalency French..." lingered. Without warning to me, a private tutor for both of us appeared shortly thereafter. This would grow over the next year, setting aside interludes to allow for Andrew's arrival, into a private instruction program covering a range of subjects including Calculus, advanced accounting for Carole, and UC Berkeley-level electrical engineering for me. This would become a sustaining project which, now free of the formal schooling regimen, stayed with both of us for many years.

Getting to November would turn into a roller coaster trip with our KWBR radio investment suddenly turning into a gold mine. It began eight days prior to our marriage, when Bill Haley and His Comets recorded 'Rock Around the Clock', although it would be early-May before a 45 copy arrived at KWBR. Nothing about the radio station - or the world - would ever again be the same. Manager Stan had already begun progressively increasing the 'white-groups-who-sound-black' content of the station and it all came to a crescendo in July when an unknown artist recorded 'That's All Right Mama'; his name being Elvis Presley. By the mid-November birth date, KWBR had risen to number two in the very competitive San Francisco radio world, pushing hard on leader KSFO. And that was but the beginning.

On November 15, precisely on Carole's schedule, Andrew arrived. The printed announcement, shared with only close friends and a few relatives, read simply:

This is now a 'family'

*"Carole Ann Caldecott-Cooper
and Robert Britt Cooper
announce the safe arrival
of their first child*

*Andrew Britt Caldecott-Cooper;
15 November 1954; weight
9 pounds 6 ounces; mother,
father and child doing well
courtesy of Dr Abraham Scott."*

Andrew had arrived like a bright light from heaven to become perfectly positioned as a 'child of the rock and roll generation' and with two teenaged parents he, and by 1956 his sister, would find it difficult - even impossible - to escape the *sounds* of a world in transition. Ahead in 1963 his parents would be approaching their tenth wedding anniversary and quietly, almost without notice, Hilda Marie would advise 'you will by the end of this year pass the one billion dollar point in total assets'; she still remaining ignorant of the safe-house stored *hard currency*. And we would then be barely 25 years young. No, life with Carole Ann would never be dull and by employing constant diligence and careful track-covering, virtually nobody even knew we existed at the top end of El Toyonal Road, Orinda. *Luckiest male or most fortunate female?* We had fifty more years to wrestle with that question. However, by 1963, as a newly redesigned Corvette appeared to significant family oohs and aahs, Carole would be directing Anita, Andrew and parents to march out each Sunday, following Gracie's breakfast, to gather at the base of the tramway adjacent to John Senior's gravesite. There we would, in unison, recite 'The Lord's Prayer' and the 'The Pledge of Allegiance'. And you, dear reader, can work out for yourself the roadmap her family-life plan was following. The '63 Corvettes? There would be two, ultimately three, at-rest in the ever expanding garage. The reason for multiple versions? Andrew - as explained in the sequel "Free, White & 25!"



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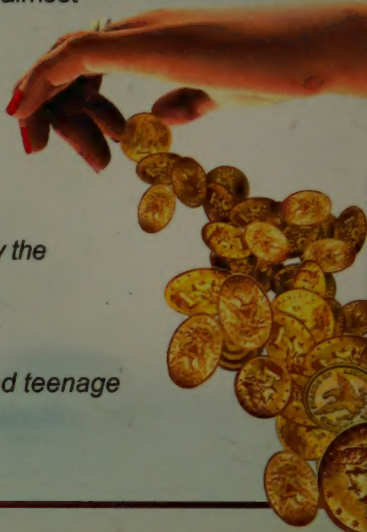
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